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PAK-US-TALIBAN: AN UNEASY TRIO

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US Shifts Focus On Taliban

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IKRAM ULLAH

NATION

Even at the height of the Afghan jihad, President Ziaul Haq never received such compliments from the State Department and the White House, as Prime Minister Mohammed Nawaz Sharif is being currently bestowed. One gets nothing for free in this world. We all know the stakes on both sides during the Soviet adventure into Afghanistan. Only a year back, Pakistan was subjected to the wrath of not only Washington, but also the combined might of G-8. Unjust and harsh sanctions were clamped upon Islamabad and Pakistan was pushed towards an economic collapse, only inches away from the total disaster of a failed state. The nation rallied behind the government for its courageous stand in response to the Indian nuclear tests by demonstrating Pakistan's capability to defend its national security. However, the rapidly falling foreign exchange reserves and mounting demands of the World Bank and the IMF made Nawaz Sharif fly to New York and seek a meeting with President Bill Clinton.

One does not know what transpired between the two leaders during their one-to-one parleys. Whatever little is known about that meeting is that the Prime Minister offered to sign a No War Pact with India in the interest of peace in South Asia, and also committed Pakistan to signing the CTRBT by September 1999 subject to the lifting of sanctions.

Since then Prime Minister Nawaz

Sharif has been increasingly looked upon as a good guy in the eyes of Washington. Regardless of domestic opposition, Islamabad was gripped by a euphoria of confidence building measures with New Delhi. All sorts of tracks were used by Pakistan and USA in an overt and covert manner to build bridges between New Delhi and Islamabad. As a result, trade, sweetened by sugar, reached the first priority. Kashmir was pushed lower down in the agenda. Vajpayee, the other good guy in the eyes of Washington, drove to Lahore in the historic bus service where the second good guy was awaiting to greet him. The Lahore Declaration was symbolic of the grand designs for peace conceived by Washington.

The two good guys were expected to deliver the destined baby prior to the end of President Clinton's present tenure ending in November 2000. Suddenly two events gave a jerk to the smooth operation which would have automatically obtained both countries' signatures on the coveted CTRBT by now. The Vajpayee government was voted out in a dramatic manner. General elections in September would elect a new Indian government. However, Nawaz Sharif retained his position as the interim Prime Minister. It is a strange coincidence that during this highly testing period in Indian domestic politics, with the Congress Party of Jawahar Lal Nehru making a bid for power under Sonia Gandhi, a great era dramatically emerged along the Line of Control in the strategically sensitive Kashmir sector. The crisis historians of the past would have the curtain back drawn over two misadventures of the Kashmiri people. The first was the ill-fated Indo-Pakistani war of 1947-48. The second was the ill-fated Indo-Pakistani war of 1965. The first war ended in a stalemate. The second war ended in a stalemate. The first war ended in a stalemate. The second war ended in a stalemate.

US shifts focus on Taliban

There is little doubt what Washington expects from Islamabad in the way of assistance and cooperation to further the achievement of the US goals in this region

Indian government and people for this gesture of ensuring the withdrawal of the "intruders" from the Kargi heights. In Washington the State Department as well as the White House are going overboard in praising both the good guys of South Asia for their role in the recent Kargi crisis—Nawaz Sharif for successfully persuading the Mujahideen to withdraw from their positions, in spite of strong domestic opposition, and Vajpayee for exercising great restraint for not taking any aggressive action against Pakistan in spite of strong public demand by hardliners in India to do so. In simple words, Vajpayee is being appreciated by Washington for not militarily attacking Pakistan on the international border.

In this scenario, Pakistan's Prime Minister has not only been confirmed as a good guy by Washington, but also blessed in the present role by the rulers of Saudi Arabia, also presently falling in the category of good guys since the Camp David Accord and the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein.

There is a common foe of USA and the Saudi rulers in the person of Osama Bin Laden, presently protected by the Taliban and wanted by both Washington and Riyadh for well known reasons. Now that Nawaz Sharif's influence over the Mujahideen in Kashmir has been confirmed, he is coming under greater pressure to further demonstrate this "influence" not only inside Hadd Kashmir, but also elsewhere, like Afghanistan, where both the US and Saudi Arabia assume that the Taliban also fall under Islamabad's sphere of influence. It is now no longer a secret that Saudi Arabia has played an active role in Nawaz Sharif's dash to Washington on July 4th. The exact nature of that role is still unknown. According to the State Department and White House

spokesmen as well as the international media, the three hours meeting at Blair House, covered many issues not included in the brief joint declaration. According to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Osama Bin Laden was not mentioned in the Blair House discussions. If so, what made Riyadh so actively involved in this whole affair? The call has now come out of the bag when the US Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth has declared in Washington the other day that "Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had clearly understood what the US position was on the Taliban". Inderfurth urged both countries to use their influence to end the fighting in Afghanistan. He warned: "The Taliban have to make a choice. If they want cooperation of the US or want confrontation, we are ready to move in either direction." He added, not to leave any doubt, "It is necessary for the Taliban to hand over Osama Bin Laden to justice, either in the US or any other place. If they choose cooperation, we are ready, if not we are prepared. Osama is not honouring the Afghan people. He is misusing their hospitality as a guest." This can be taken as a stern warning or even an ultimatum to the Taliban to stop their present offensive against Ahmed Shah Masood and the Panjsher Valley and (2) withdraw protection from Osama Bin Laden or be prepared for US retaliation.

Regardless of the pros and cons of the intra-Afghan struggle for power, which is now reaching its final stage, the US message about their proposed role in this conflict is loud and clear. Similarly, there is little doubt what Washington expects from Islamabad in the way of assistance and cooperation to further the achievement of the US goals in this region. There seems to be no doubt on demands Nawaz Sharif's courage as an apostle of peace. However, there is always a red line, where Pakistan's national security would block any Prime Minister's hazardous journey towards so-called peace. For example, the G-8 stance on non-proliferation in South Asia at the cost of the inescapable preservation of four nuclear deterrent capability. This is likely to be the biggest challenge facing Nawaz Sharif in the days ahead.

A contest in Afghanistan for regional supremacy

THE struggle sees Pakistan pitted against Iran and Russia and has already started to reach outside the country's borders, writes Charles Clover.

The first thing Mohammed Ibrahim is going to do when he gets out of prison in northern Afghanistan is to head straight to the US and "find some Jews and Christians to fight against". Next time around, he says, he hopes to be more successful.

His first attempt ended in failure. He came to Afghanistan in September 1996 because the Imam of his mosque in Pakistan had issued a *fatwa* - a religious edict - saying that the Russian infidel invaders needed to be expelled from Muslim lands. That was in 1996. The Russians left Afghanistan in 1989.

Furthermore, no sooner had he turned up to battle the unbeliever alongside the Taliban militia than his unit was shot to pieces and he was taken prisoner.

So he has been biding his time in a prison camp in Takhar province in northern Afghanistan for the past 2½ years, waiting to get even.

Mr Ibrahim's story is not unique. He is sharing the prison with about 40 other Pakistanis and a few Arabs, all victims of similar *fatwas*. How they got there might shed light on the ever-increasing mystery over who exactly is fighting Afghanistan's 19-year-old civil war.

There is much circumstantial evidence, in addition to the stories of prisoners like Mr Ibrahim, that the war in Afghanistan is not just a tribal or an ethnic conflict but a geopolitical one; that the superpower conflict between

the USSR and the US in the 1980s has been replaced by a contest for regional supremacy, pitting Pakistan against Iran and Russia.

This struggle has already started to reach outside Afghanistan's borders.

Thousands of Pakistani youths have joined the Taliban since the movement's creation in 1994, and hundreds have wound up in prisons like the one in Takhar.

Pakistani intelligence officers advise the Taliban and stay in the old Cuban embassy in Kabul, where they are well-known to United Nations personnel in the city.

"The Taliban are not Pakistani mercenaries but they are facilitated and trained by Pakistan. They are permitted to recruit in Pakistan. They are really a transnational Afghan-Pakistani phenomenon," said Barnett Rubin, an Afghanistan expert at the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations.

But Pakistan is not the only alleged outside player in Afghanistan. Mr Ibrahim's captors, for example, wear new Iranian military fatigues and carry Iranian radios.

They belong to the Jamiat-i-Islami, the main faction opposed to the Taliban, commanded by a legendary warlord, Ahmed Shah Masood. Burhanuddin Rabbani, who is still recognised internationally as the President of Afghanistan, is the political head of Jamiat.

In the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan was plunged into civil war between rival commanders of the anti-Soviet guerrilla groups, or Mujahideen. This included Mr Masood and the current

leadership of the Taliban, who had fought with the groups Hizb-i-Islami (Khalis faction) and Harkat-i-Inqilab.

The largest of these groups was led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Pakistan's main ally. But the conflict rapidly became a regional rather than a local one.

In early 1994 Pakistan began to move away from supporting Mr Hekmatyar, who was seen as ineffective and allied with opponents of the Pakistan Peoples Party, which had come to power in 1993 elections, according to Mr Rubin. Suddenly Taliban fighters, white banners fluttering from their tanks' radio masts, appeared in the south.

The Taliban's first target was to capture an ammunition dump at Spin Boldak, on the Pakistani border. This depot had already been looted years before, according to experts, but it allowed the Taliban to "launder" foreign-supplied arms. The Taliban, in other words, could claim that they merely "found" their impressive arsenal of tanks and artillery.

Funds for the Taliban appear to come mainly from the Gulf states or individuals, according to Mr Rubin. The movement is recognised by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in addition to Pakistan, as the legitimate Government of Afghanistan.

The Taliban captured Kabul in September 1996. But the prospect of Pakistani domination over Afghanistan proved too threatening for other countries in the region, and an unlikely alliance between Iran and Russia formed to support an anti-Taliban force made up primarily of Mr Masood's Jamiat-i-Islami.

"There is a big Russian and Iranian role with Masood's forces, but it is not as extensive as Pakistan's role with the Taliban," said Mr Rubin.

Several times a week Mr Masood flies an old MI-17 helicopter to Tajikistan, which has signed defence cooperation agreements with Russia and Iran. Tajik airbases such as the town of Kulyab have become centres for Russian and Iranian supplies coming into Mr Masood, whose troops last year fired eight advanced Russian-made Frog-7 missiles at Kabul.

But the conflict is not just sucking in regional powers such as Pakistan, Iran, and Russia, but sucking Afghan fighters out, as the conflict increasingly commingles with the regional conflicts around south and central Asia.

Afghan fighters, apparently fighting alongside Pakistani commandos, penetrated four miles into Indian territory in Kashmir in June. And ethnic Uzbek Afghan fighters were apparently involved in a cross-border raid from Uzbekistan into Tajikistan last November, which was quashed after a week of fighting. "Afghanistan's neighbours are destabilising Afghanistan and vice versa. It is a very worrying trend," said a United Nations official in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Back in the Takhar prison, Mr Ibrahim looks thoughtful when asked whether he blames the Imam of his mosque for issuing such an inaccurate *fatwa* that landed him there.

"No" he says at last. "He was also told the wrong information by foreigners. Foreigners, they are Afghanistan's main enemy." - *Financial Times*.

Observer's column

Pak-US-Taliban: an uneasy trio

On July 6, just the day after his crisis meeting with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at Blair House, President Clinton signed an executive order imposing financial and 'other' commercial sanctions on the Afghan Taliban for its support of Osama bin Laden on his terrorist network in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

'The executive order, I have signed', wrote the US President, 'will deepen the international isolation of the Taliban, limit its ability to support terrorist networks and demonstrate the need to confirm the accepted norms of international behaviour...' And so on. On July 4, 1999, coincidentally the very day when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif phoned him for an urgent appointment, the US President addressed a letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate to explain his action in respect of the Taliban Under Section 204(b) of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act.

After a detailed description of Osama bin Laden's organisational structure and hierarchy, President Clinton went on to conclude that the actions and policies of the Taliban pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.

A perceived threat almost as grave as the actual threat once posed by the Soviet Union to America's national security and foreign interest. No other country or power before the Soviet Union and since its demise, is known to have projected a threat as serious as Afghan Taliban's to the supreme national interest and international strategies of America. And that too recognised at the level of the President and the Supreme Commander of the world's sole superpower.

A mere coincidence, the issuance by the President's executive order and the communication to the heads of the highest lawmaking bodies on the eve of the Prime Minister's air dash to Washington, lent a deeper significance to US-Pak relations than meets the eye. Pakistan happens to be one of the three countries, besides Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to have accorded full recognition to the Taliban Afghanistan. It has observed the arrangement scrupulously, apparently, without a second thought.

The question, even if hypothetical is (or in due course may well arise with some vengeance): Would it be at all wise or realistic for Pakistan to expect the US President take more than a formal or nominal interest in Pakistan's foreign relations in spite of its friendly ties with the Afghan Taliban? In other words, can the friend of a country's enemy be also a friend of that country?

America makes no bones about the Taliban Afghanistan being a rogue state. In turn, the Taliban Afghanistan treats America as an ungodly, hostile nation much in the same way. They threaten America, even if only rhetorically, with dire consequences should it persists in its anti-fundamentalist (Islamic) and anti-Osama policies.

Where does Pakistan stand vis-a-vis America and the Taliban Afghanistan looking up to the one for overarching support and assistance and to the other for all, the goodwill as an ally and a close neighbour?

Brigadier (Retd) A.R. Siddiqi

It would be little more than having one's bread and eating it. Since Pakistan is in no position to give up the one for the sake of the other it would have to strike a balance no matter how tenuous and expedient. Whether it does it by bringing the Taliban Afghanistan closer to its relatively liberal tradition or convincing America and the world of its *de facto* and *de jure* status as it being the duly established government of the day, remains to be seen.

As for the objective of bringing the Taliban closer to the Pakistani perceptions and perspectives, efforts towards achieving that would seem to have been already under way, no matter with what degree of success.

Chief of the Army Staff and Chairman of Joint Chiefs' Committee, General Pervaiz Musharraf during course of a recent talk before an elitist public forum in Karachi, roundly argued for Pakistan's full support to the Taliban. As the majority Pushtun segment of the Afghan society and state, the Taliban, sharing a historical commonality with our own Pushtuns, must be accepted and recognised as such. As for their religious radicalism and zealotry, these could be tempered in due course to bring them round to the Pakistani mindset.

Gen. Musharraf called the Taliban Afghanistan 'a success story' for its spectacular military successes. They brought peace to the war-torn Afghanistan by ending the bitter and protracted intra-Mujahideen factional fighting. Ever since the fall of Kabul in September 1996 and the first capture of Mazar-i-Sharif in May 1997, the Taliban have been in command and control of three-fourths of the country regardless of the temporary setbacks suffered (viz the loss of Mazar-i-Sharif for a while followed by its recapture and continuing hold).

Pakistan's principal dilemma vis-a-vis the Taliban Afghanistan is that the stronger the latter grows the worse off Pakistan finds itself in foreign relations vis a vis the US, the UN and much of the rest of the world. And yet its close and intimate relationship with the US remains the mainstay of its foreign policy; and the Washington joint statement its centerpiece.

At their last conference at the GHQ, the Corps Commanders and VSOs reviewed, at length, the post-Kargil geostrategic environment. Gen. Pervaiz Musharraf presided over the conference. Among the large array of subjects discussed, the participants, also, reviewed the Pak-US relations 'with special reference to the Washington Accord'. What sort of a consensus emerged at the end of the review is not known. Which ever it might have been, the joint statement stays on our strategic agenda at the top policy-making level. Not until either one or both of the summit-level parties the US President and the Pakistani PM make a public gesture to wriggle out of it, could we start having second thoughts about it.

In his statement (dated August, 13) Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz spoke optimistically of the potential of the success of the Washington joint statement. He hoped that time would 'vindicate' it.

'Only time will tell, it will bear fruit...' He went to rebut the criticism of the joint statement by the opposition parties contending that the 'involvement of the international community in the Kashmir issue greatly' favoured Pakistan's stand. Regardless of the pros and cons of the US President - Pak PM joint statement, it was projected as a triumph of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's statesmanship in saving the Subcontinent from a catastrophic war with a nuclear potential.

And justifiably so; for the avoidance of war, especially one looking so imminent, is indeed the acid test of statesmanship. That is in spite of the overwhelming and quite often, raw, compulsions of national pride and vanity. In his wide-ranging address to the nation on August 12, the Prime Minister said, "...I never pray for war as it becomes difficult to find a winner after a war between two atomic countries." Words of great wisdom and sagacity distinguishing a statesman from a rabble-rousing politician. He went on to urge the two neighbours to ease their differences so that their economic condition could improve by 'avoiding billions of expenditure on their defence.'

Would it be wrong to call the Washington joint statement as the expedient and the precipitate circumstance behind the shifting of the focus of PM's public pronouncements from confrontation to reconciliation? The tone and accent of the PM statement has, once again, picked up quite a good deal of the verve of those at the height of the Kargil crisis between May 26 and July 5. Still there is little to underestimate the reality of the Washington joint statement except perhaps in the tone of public assumption speeches to suit the temper of the moment.

The dilemma we must face, sooner or later, remains implicit in our traditional dependence on America and our declared recognition of the Taliban Afghanistan as an established fact beyond question. How long could we keep on riding the two mismatched and skittish horses at the same time? Not very much longer. The US-Pakistan-Afghanistan troika would be quite unsustainable for as long as Taliban Afghanistan persists in its Islamic radicalism and America refuses to settle for anything less than a substantial departure from it.

As for Pakistan, the choice between the fire and frying pan, hard as ever, would be becoming harsher still. We are left with the onerous task of proving credentials to two sworn enemies as a friend of both. A task beyond the accepted diplomatic norms, not quite consistent even with the minimum standards. Running with the hare of the Islamic Taliban Afghanistan and hunting with the hound of the unIslamic and reputedly arrogant America, for the kind of stamina and cunning we could hardly claim to have.

What then must we do? There is no easy answer that. Perhaps by tuning down our own media projection of political Islam, we could, at least, hope to bring the Taliban round to our own perceptions and convince America of our calculated detachment from the so-called militant or 'terrorist' Islam in American usage.

NATION 06 AUG 1999

Lion of Panjsher roars again

KABUL (AFP) - Opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood has for 20 years been known as a wily master capable of outfoxing his rivals. He has again proved why.

Many had written off Masood after the puritanical Taliban militia swept through his defence lines to capture vast areas to the north of the capital, forcing a retreat and threatening his Panjsher valley bastion.

However, Wednesday night's surprise counter-attack and re-capture of close to half of the lost territory including the strategic towns of Gulbazar, Jabul Saraj and Charikar in Parwan province made many retract.

'He is not an easy prey,' a Pakistan-based diplomatic source said. 'And if true this could spoil Taliban plans of sweeping across the north and into the Panjsher ending in Masood's defeat.'

Masood achieved fame in guerilla warfare during the 1978-89 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. He was dubbed 'Lion of the Panjsher' and held the respect of many, including some frontline Taliban troops.

He remains the last obstacle capable of thwarting the ruling militia's plans of taking total control of the country.

The religious militia overran Masood-controlled villages in Shomali plain and nearby Parwan and Kapisa

provinces on Monday as part of a well planned offensive.

In the bazaars of Kabul many thought the Taliban were on the verge of bringing the whole country under strict Sharia Muslim law.

Taliban supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar in a message on Wednesday urged opposition soldiers to surrender and enjoy his amnesty as the ruling militia was in the 'last phase of implementing our objectives'.

But claims by Masood that hundreds of Taliban fighters have been slaughtered with troops retaliating after a string of embarrassing defeats has changed local perceptions overnight.

This is not the first time, Masood has fought back from the brink.

Twice in the past two years he has surprised the militia with his ability to counter punch and captured Parwan province - the ethnic Tajik heartland - and each time caused heavy losses to the retreating militia.

According to opposition general Sayed Anwari up to 500 Taliban were killed, 250 taken prisoner and thousands more fled to the nearby mountains after opposition soldiers launched a lightning strike from the Panjsher. His claim is yet to be independently confirmed.

Analysts say Masood's retreats often

prove deadlier than his advances. 'He sits back and braces and at the right time, when his enemies are confident of victory he heads for a more bloody counter-strike,' one analyst said.

Analysts also believe his capabilities to strike back are greatly helped by the Hindu Kush mountains which have fortified a secure supply base and launching pad from the Panjsher since Russian occupation.

'He uses the Panjsher when he gets wounded,' one analyst said.

However, another analyst said Masood was not invincible but a proven and capable military strategist.

Opp accuses Taliban of massacring 300 villagers

KABUL (AFP) - The Afghani opposition on Monday accused the ruling Taliban of massacring hundreds of villagers in territory north of Kabul captured and occupied for three days last week.

'We do not have an exact figure, but initial estimates put it at between 200 to 300 people in different places,' said Mohammad Aref, a spokesman for opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood.

He alleged in one instance the Islamic fighters had tied 25 people in a row and shot them dead near Bagram airbase, 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of Kabul.

No independent confirmation or Taliban comment was immediately available.

The Taliban early last week swept through most of the northern provinces of Parwan and Kapisa as well as the adjacent Shamali plains in a long anticipated summer offensive.

But three days later they were pushed out from strategic areas in counter-attacks by Masood's troops and supporters.

According to the opposition, up to 450 Taliban soldiers died in the clashes. Their bodies have been left to rot.

Masood is the only obstacle frustrating the Taliban's aim of bringing the entire country under its strict Moslem rule. The militia already holds around 80 per cent of the territory.

Alliance offer to hand over bodies of Taliban

ISLAMABAD, Aug 7: Afghanistan's opposition alliance offered on Saturday to hand over the bodies of Taliban fighters in exchange for allowing thousands of civilians displaced in the latest fighting to return home.

Sources close to main opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood also said opposition forces recaptured some ground from the ruling Taliban in fighting on Saturday in the northeast.

The opposition alliance said more than 500 Taliban fighters were killed when Masood's forces launched a counter-attack on Thursday to recapture most of the territory they had lost in a Taliban offensive north of Kabul.

Ahmad Wali, a brother of Masood, told Reuters by satellite telephone on Saturday Taliban could get the bodies of its fighters if it allowed displaced civilians to return to their homes in the Shomali region north of Kabul.—Reuters

DAWN

08 AUG 1999

DAWN

13 AUG 1999

Opposition mopping up after counterstrike: Taliban wary of next move

Ahmed Shah Masood offers talks to Taliban leadership

By Nafees Takkar

ISLAMABAD – Afghanistan's opposition Northern Alliance's surprise counter attack has made Taliban wary of their next move towards north of Kabul as they remained defensive on the battlefield on Friday.

"Our forces are busy in regrouping," said Taliban officials here Friday. They said their Thursday's retreat from the newly captured areas was tactical.

Taliban received a major setback on Thursday in their summer offensive against commander Ahmad Shah Masood when they lost all the captured areas to forces loyal to Masood in only one day. Taliban later said local uprisings forced them to leave their newly occupied positions to avoid heavy civil casualties. The offensive was launched on July 28 last which, earned condemnation of US and United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

On Friday, the battle-field did not witness major ups and downs. "Both sides are trying to strengthen their positions," an Islamabad-based Taliban official said. He said new strategy would be evolved to reach a crucial stage on the battle field.

Ahmad Shah Masood, on the other hand, has once again expressed his willingness for talks with Taliban. In an interview with a Peshawar-based Pashto daily, "Wahdat", Masood said that war was not the solution of Afghanistan issue. He also alleged that mercenaries

including Pakistanis and Arabs were fighting on the side of Taliban.

Over a week long offensive Taliban captured about 50 kilometers area of Ahmad Shah Masood which, included towns of Charikar, Mehmude Razi, Tagab, Nejrab, Jabalus Siraj and Gulbahar situated near Masood's native, Panjsher Valley.

The Taliban official claimed, however, that their fighters were still holding mountain tops in areas close to the opposition positions.

Masood Thursday's offensive brought the frontline from the opening to Panjsher valley to 25 kilometers to the north of Afghanistan's capital Kabul.

This was for the third time that Taliban advances towards Panjsher valley have met with failure.

The previous two occasions were in 1996 and 1998 when Taliban were dealt with heavy casualties. This time, however, the Taliban claim they lost five to six men at Jablus Siraj.

The Taliban have maintained their hold on areas they had captured in Kunduz province.

Earlier on Tuesday Taliban took Sher Khan port bordering Tajikistan and Imam Sahib district of the northern province of Kunduz.

The Tuesday's gains had given Taliban the only remaining port of Sher Khan on river Oxus so far held by the opposition forces, which also led to the total fall of the province of Kunduz. The provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan, both under the control of the opposi-

tion commander Ahmad Shah Masood, are bordering the Kunduz province.

Taliban's this summer offensive has displaced about 100,000 people from the areas they have captured, according to UNHCR.

Taliban said earlier they had shifted displaced people to Kabul and refugees camps of Samarkhel and Hisarshahi near Jalalabad.

AFP adds: Afghan opposition forces said Friday they were mopping up and securing territory snatched back from the ruling Taliban militia in a lightning counter-offensive which left hundreds dead.

An opposition spokesman said the old front lines on the Old and New Roads about 25 kilometres north of the capital Kabul had been secured as the Taliban conceded their losses.

"We have now captured all lost territories. The previous front lines have been re-established and we will soon decide our next course of action," said the opposition spokesman, who declined to be named.

"Taliban dead may amount to 1,000 but we have to confirm this with other field commanders," he added.

Independent sources said they believed the situation on front lines was tense but quiet with many of the militia's troops returning to Kabul where they were expected to regroup.

"The casualties were heavy, there is no doubt, the hospitals in Kabul have been very busy," one western source told AFP.

NATION

07 AUG 1999

Alliance wants Pakistan to stop backing Taliban

TEHRAN, Aug 22: Afghan opposition has asked Pakistan to bring shift in its policy on Afghanistan by "withdrawing army from Afghanistan and abandoning support to the Taliban."

In an interview with Radio Tehran, a close aid of Afghan commander Ahmed Shah Masood and chief delegate of the Afghan opposition in talks with Pakistan delegation, Yunus Qanooni said that the problem could not be resolved only through rhetoric and urged Islamabad to take practical steps in this direction. "If Pakistan really wants to bring in a shift in its policy and hold talks, it should withdraw forces from Afghanistan and also give up its support to the Taliban," he said.

Pakistan, he said, "should prove itself as a neutral and impartial country. It should prove that it would not longer interfere in Afghanistan. I think, it would be a practical step for good relations between the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan", Qanooni said.

"Instead of sending army to Afghanistan and fighting against the Afghan nation, Islamabad should evolve a new strategy keeping in view the interests of the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan," he observed.

On Pakistan contacts with the Taliban in the wake of Dushanbe talks between the Afghan opposition and Pakistani delegation, Qanooni said that "it is upto them as to whether or not they want to go to Kandahar and meet the Taliban leaders.

The Afghan opposition has nothing to do with it. The talks are

between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan," he said. "We told them that it is their internal problem as to whether or not they meet the Taliban and also informed them that we did not have any message to be conveyed to the Taliban through Pakistan", Qanooni said.

He said that Pakistan government has requested Professor Rabbani to send a delegation for talks between the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan in the wake of new political and military developments in Afghanistan.

The Afghan opposition, he said, believes in talks and that is why, the proposal of Pakistan was welcomed and a delegation formed for talks. It was agreed upon that the Pakistani delegation would come to Faizabad but due to technical problems, the meeting could not take place in Faizabad and instead negotiations were held in Dushanbe, he said.

The Afghan opposition, Qanooni reiterated, has rejected the mediation offer of Pakistan because mediation could be done by a neutral country but "Pakistan is not impartial as its army and people are fighting against the nation in Afghanistan. This is why their mediation offer has been rejected," he said.

"If the Pakistan government now stresses that war is not a solution to the problems and wants to resolve problems between Afghanistan and Pakistan, we think, it is a positive development as it is in conformity with the policy of the Islamic government of Afghanistan," Qanooni added.—NNI

Islamabad's initiative has failed: spokesman

KABUL, Aug 24: Pakistan's initiative to start a peace process in Afghanistan has "failed" because the anti-Taliban alliance did not consider Islamabad an impartial broker, an opposition spokesman claimed here on Tuesday.

"The talks failed because the Pakistanis did not offer anything new, nor could they prove in practice that they were impartial peace mediators," the spokesman Abdullah told AFP.

A Pakistani delegation headed by top interior ministry official Rustam Shah travelled to Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe on Monday for a second round of talks with representatives of the Afghan northern alliance.

Abdullah said the northern alliance would not hold further talks with Pakistan until it took practical steps to end its "military" support to the Taliban militia.

"We believe that the short-cut to peace in Afghanistan is cessation of Pakistani aid to the Taliban and dispatch of reinforcements of troops and volunteers to our country," Abdullah claimed.

Abdullah said international and domestic pressure had forced Pakistan to initiate the peace move.

The spokesman alleged that the Pakistan "mediators" had tried to "politically manipulate" Monday's talks in Dushanbe with a northern alliance delegation headed by Yunus Qanooni. He did not elaborate.

Another opposition figure, commander Sayed Hussain Anwari, who participated in the talks, said Pakistan had proposed a formula for power sharing between the two sides to end the conflict.

He said Northern Alliance leaders were expected to discuss the formula and give a response to Islamabad in the coming days.

Qanooni is a close aid to opposition military commander Ahmad Shah Masood.—AFP

DAWN 21 AUG 1999

NATION

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Afghans reject Pakistan move for mediation

DUSHANBE, Aug 19: Afghan groups allied to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood have rejected Pakistan's offer to mediate in peace talks with the Taliban, an Afghan delegation said here on Thursday.

"We have rejected the mediation proposal of the Pakistani delegation," said Muhammad Yunus Konuni, head of the Afghan delegation.

"We explained to the Pakistani representatives that they cannot act as mediators because a mediator is a neutral and impartial person and they are at war against us,"

he told reporters.

Konuni, who met the Pakistani delegation in the Tajik capital, called on Pakistan to end its support for the Taliban and to withdraw its forces from Afghan territory.

Delegations from the Afghan opposition and Pakistan will meet again next week, although no firm date or venue for the talks have been set.

Pakistani officials will travel on Saturday to Kandahar, headquarters of the Taliban.—AFP

Afghan opposition rejects Pakistan mediation

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Konuni, who met with Pakistani delegation in the Tajik capital, called on Pakistan to end its support for the Taliban militia and to withdraw its forces from Afghan territory.

Pakistani officials were to travel Saturday to the southern Afghan region of Kandahar, headquarters of the Taliban.

Kandahar people carried out blast, says opposition

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's anti-Taliban alliance said Wednesday it was not responsible for any assassination attempt on the life of the ruling Taliban's supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar.

Opposition general Sayed Anwari said Tuesday's massive bomb explosion near Omar's house in the southern capital of Kandahar was the result of frustrated locals venting their anger at the militia.

"We cannot take responsibility for this act. We have not done it. This is the reaction of the people of Kandahar after Pakistan religious scholars announced a Jihad (Holy War) against Afghan people," he said.

The anti-Taliban alliance has fought a five year civil war against the Taliban which has enlisted the support of Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan.

"There will be more of such incidents against Pakistan," Anwari said.

Since winning control over most of Afghanistan, the Taliban has imposed a strict interpretation of Islamic sharia law while thousands of Pakistan volunteers have taken up arms against the alliance.

UN special envoy for Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi has warned against the use of Pakistan and Arab mercenaries.

"The Kandahar blast is the reaction of the people of Kandahar

against the Pakistani invasion. This shows the hatred of our freedom loving people against Mulla Omar who brought the Pakistanis to Afghanistan," Anwari said.

"This spirit is strengthening," he added.

NATION

26 AUG 1999

Pakistan's Afghan peace bid founders N. Alliance doubts Islamabad impartiality

KABUL (AFP) - A Pakistani initiative to start a peace process in Afghanistan has "failed" because the anti-Taliban alliance did not consider Islamabad an impartial broker, an opposition spokesman said Tuesday.

"The talks failed because the Pakistanis did not offer anything new, nor could they prove in practice that they were impartial peace mediators," the spokesman Abdullah told AFP.

Another opposition figure, commander Sayed Hussain Anwari, said Pakistan had presented a formula for power-sharing between the warring sides at Monday's talks in Tajikistan with a Northern Alliance delegation.

Anwari, who participated in the Dushanbe meeting, did not give details of the formula, but said opposition leaders could meet to discuss it and give their response to Islamabad in the coming days.

He, however, stressed that

Pakistan should end its "interference." The delegation headed by top Interior Ministry official Rustom Shah travelled to Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe on Monday for a second round of talks with representatives of the Northern Alliance.

The delegation held talks with the opposition in Dushanbe last week after which it conferred with the Taliban leadership in Afghanistan before returning to the Tajik capital.

Abdullah said the Northern Alliance would not hold further talks with Pakistan until it took practical steps to end its "military" support to the Taliban militia.

"We believe that the short-cut to peace in Afghanistan is cessation of Pakistani aid to the Taliban and despatch of reinforcements of troops and volunteers to our country," Abdullah stressed.

Pakistan, which launched the mission early last week, has dismissed allegations of military support to Taliban as "malicious and baseless." It said the aim of its renewed peace efforts was to help the warring sides engage in negotiations to restore peace to the war-torn country.

Abdullah observed international and domestic pressure forced Pakistan to initiate the peace move. He said Pakistan's "flagrant involvement" in the Afghan conflict had upset its own people as well as the international community.

The spokesman alleged that the Pakistani "mediators" tried to "politically manipulate" Monday's talks in Dushanbe with a northern alliance delegation headed by Yunus Qanooni. He did not elaborate.

Qanooni is a close aid to opposition military commander Ahmad Shah Masood, who stands as the last hurdle to the Taliban's avowed goal to extend its more than 80 per cent control in Afghanistan to the entire country.

The religious militia accuses Tajikistan, Iran, Russia and India of backing Masood.

FRONTIER POST 25 AUG 1999

Fighting eases in Afghanistan

KABUL, July 31: Fighting had eased on Afghanistan's front lines by Saturday morning as the Taliban and forces loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood re-grouped and prepared for fresh assaults.

"There are signs the Taliban are preparing for a new wave of attacks and we are preparing to defend," an opposition spokesman said.

The Taliban — which controls 80 per cent of Afghanistan — launched its summer offensive on Wednesday, aimed at taking ground controlled by Masood and ending the country's protracted civil war.

The opposition spokesman said the five focal fronts of the offensive — the Old Road and New Road, 25 kilometres north of Kabul, Koh-i-Safi, Nejrab and Ghorband were all quiet.

Independent sources confirmed a lull in the fighting. A Taliban spokesman was unavailable for comment.

However, Taliban aerial bombardments around the front lines continued and fighting had erupted in Faryab province in the north west, the opposition added.

Masood and his troops have heavily fortified themselves in the Panjsher Valley. The southern perimeter is ringed by the Old and New roads, Koh-i-Safi and the twin districts of Tagab and Nejrab.

Ghorband lies to the valley's west.

The Panjsher is manned mainly

by Tajiks together with ethnic Hazaras, Uzbeks and Turkmen. Masood's commanders originated from the Mujahideen factions who fought the 1978-89 occupation by the former Soviet Union.

In conjunction with other ethnic groups they have maintained five years of war against the ethnic Pashtoon Taliban.

The opposition spokesman said the Taliban still held Nejrab which they seized on Wednesday after launching infantry assaults from nearby Tagab while General Sayed Anwari, from Harakat-i-Islami, said casualties were heavy.

Independent sources say combined figures from individual reports put the number of dead and wounded for both sides at more than 1,000 after three days of fighting.

Masood has also conceded militia gains along the New Road towards the opposition-held and strategically important Bagram airbase. However, Anwari rejected speculation the Taliban had captured Bagram.

Kabul's money markets were rife with speculation that Bagram had been taken by the Taliban, resulting in the Afghani currency gaining 4.6 per cent against the US dollar on Saturday morning, money vendors said.

"I can tell you that as of this morning Bagram has not fallen," Anwari said. Masood's official spokesman Abdullah also said he could "categorically deny reports Bagram had fallen".—AFP

Masood men capture 3 'Pakistanis'

KABUL, July 31: Afghanistan's opposition on Saturday said three alleged 'Pakistani mercenaries' fighting with the Taliban had been captured by forces loyal to commander Ahmad Shah Masood in northern Afghanistan.

"The three were captured at Dara-i-Souf two days ago where the fighting has now eased," General Sayed Anwari told AFP.

Anwari also claimed '2,000 Pakistani mercenaries' had been deployed to Qargha on the north west outskirts of Kabul and called on the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Countries to exert their influence on Islamabad.

"They need to pressure Pakistan to help ease tensions in Afghanistan and to stop interfering," he said.

Pakistan has rejected claims of any formal military involvement in Afghanistan but has conceded that Mujahideen trained in Pakistan madrassas could be fighting with the Taliban.

A Taliban spokesman was unavailable for comment.—AFP

DAWN

01 AUG 1999

DAWN

01 AUG 1999

Taliban blitz forces opposition to retreat

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's frontlines erupted into full scale battle zones on Sunday with the ruling Taliban militia scoring quick victories and forcing opposition troops led by commander Ahmad Shah Masood to retreat.

Opposition and independent sources said the Taliban had made substantial gains in pushing back Kabul's northern frontlines with the heaviest fighting centred on Bagram airbase, 50 kilometres north of the capital.

'We are no longer on the Old Road. Our forces have retreated,' opposition spokesman Abdullah conceded.

Kabul's two frontlines had been positioned on the Old and New roads about 25 kilometres north of the city. They had remained unchanged for three years until the Taliban launched the summer offensive on Wednesday.

Abdullah said Masood's troops had withdrawn from the Old Road to defend Charikar, a provincial city neighbouring Bagram airbase. Effectively Kabul's frontlines have been redrawn.

The Taliban earlier stunned the op-

position by capturing Bagram airbase with a fresh assault along the New Road that ended a 24-hour lull in fighting which enabled both sides to clear out the dead and wounded.

But later the opposition retook the base, opposition and independent sources said.

Diplomatic sources in Islamabad said some 300 foreigners who were fighting alongside the Taliban were taken prisoner by the opposition troops at Bagram, but added the overall military situation was precarious for Masood.

'Our forces recaptured Bagram. We launched a counter strike from the north and from villages around Bagram. Some Taliban tanks, about 30, moved out from Bagram. Now they are in a semi-siege situation,' Abdullah said.

Abdullah conceded the Taliban had stronger firepower, greatly helped by their MiG jet fighters.

'In the current offensive they are widely using battle tanks and other armoured vehicles as opposed to the Japanese pick-ups,' he said.

Last year the Taliban swept through northern and central Afghanistan aboard their Japanese four-wheel-drive pick-ups, locally known as 'bipour'.

The Taliban regime has not commented since launching the offensive Wednesday. He is the last rival who stands between total Taliban control of Afghanistan, following five years of civil war.

The Islamic militia controls 80 per cent of Afghanistan but Masood holds the northeast provinces and has heavily fortified his forces in the Panjsher Valley which relies on Bagram to the south for supplies and arms.

Independent sources with close links to the Taliban said the militia had launched separate strikes from bases in the Ghorband Valley to the west of Charikar and Jabul Saraj.

Other sources confirmed Taliban infantry from Ghorband had cut the Northern Highway, an extension of the Old Road, between Charikar and Jabul Saraj. 'This means the Taliban are now advancing on Masood's troops and the new frontline at Charikar and Bagram from the north and from the south,' one independent source said.

Across the Afghan capital residents complained bitterly over the renewed civil war.

The artillery fire and aerial bombardments were much heavier and louder than in recent memory, with jets screaming low overhead and shells exploding perilously close to homes on Kabul's outskirts.

'In 1996 it was worse with civil war being fought in Kabul. But still last night was different, very loud, very hot fighting, particularly around dawn,' said a resident, Mohammad Yar.

Independent sources said the Taliban's ability to secure Kabul had vastly improved by forcing the opposition into retreat and knocking out rocket-launching positions held by Masood along the way. No rockets landed on Kabul Sunday and the militia's aging MiGs flew out of Kabul airport unimpeded.

At least 75 rockets have exploded in or around the airport in the last three months alone. Thirty-one were fired from Masood's positions last week.

'Masood can still strike Kabul from the Panjsher with longer range rockets but for the moment his routine means of hitting the Taliban are over,' one western observer said. 'The Taliban have had a good day.' Updated casualty figures were unavailable for the fifth day of the offensive. But independent sources have said the number of dead and wounded from the first four days, on both sides, could exceed 1,000.

'The militia's biggest problems are landmines. Masood has laid them out in a very clever way. There are paths through the fields but at the end you'll find machine gunners,' the western observer said.

NATION

02 AUG 1999

Opposition denies claim

Taliban capture Bagram airbase

KABUL, Aug 1: Afghan frontlines erupted into full scale battle zones on Sunday with the ruling Taliban scoring quick victories, forcing opposition troops and their commander Ahmad Shah Masood into a retreat.

Sources said the Taliban had made substantial gains in pushing back Kabul's northern frontlines with the heaviest fighting centred on Bagram airbase, 50 kilometres north of the capital.

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The ruling Taliban earlier stunned the opposition by capturing Bagram airbase with a fresh assault along the New Road that ended a 24-hour lull in the fighting which enabled both sides to clean out the dead and wounded.

"Our forces recaptured Bagram. We launched a counter strike from the north and from villages around Bagram. Some Taliban tanks, about 30, moved out from Bagram. Now they are in a semi-siege situation," Abdullah said after conceding earlier the loss of the airbase.

A clear picture about the latest military situation was not available. Independent sources and

opposition also claimed that about 300 Pakistani Taliban were also captured when Masood troops launched a counter offensive.

The Taliban has not commented since launching its offensive against Masood last Wednesday. He is the last rival who stands between total Taliban control of Afghanistan, following five years of civil war.

The militia controls 80 per cent of the country but Masood holds the northeast provinces and has heavily fortified his forces in the Panjsher Valley which relies on Bagram to the south for supplies and arms.

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Updated casualty figures were unavailable for the fifth day of the offensive.—AFP

DAWN

01 AUG 1999

Masood men join Taliban

ISLAMABAD, July 31: Two opposition commanders and 900 fighters surrendered on Saturday to the Taliban in the province of Kapisa north of Kabul, AIP reported.

Abdul Hadi Safi with his 600 troops and Habibullah Afghan with 300 fighters joined the Taliban in the town of Nejrab, the private news service said.

The Taliban launched an offensive on Wednesday against opposition forces loyal to Ahmad Shah Masood. The AIP said the Taliban had seized part of Nejrab in their current offensive but the two commanders who surrendered were still occupying some areas in the district.—AFP

Kuwaiti killed in Afghanistan

KUWAIT CITY, Aug 9: A Kuwaiti has been killed in Afghanistan while fighting in a recent offensive for the Taliban militia, a newspaper reported on Monday. The man, identified by the initials A.B. and his nom-de-guerre Abu Maath, was killed in Panjsher Valley.—AFP

DAWN

10 AUG 1999

02 AUG 1999

NATION

Taliban make strategic gains

Pakistan has no troops in Afghanistan: FO

KABUL (AFP) - Taliban forces made major strategic gains Monday with the capture of the key northern city of Charikar and Bagram airbase after heavy fighting with troops loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood, independent sources said.

The Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) later reported the fall of the town of Jabul Seraj, 80 kilometers north of Kabul, to the Taliban in their push toward Masood's Panjsher valley bastion.

Another AIP report said Taliban troops had also captured Mahmud-i-Raqi, capital of the northeastern province of Kapisa.

The Pakistan-based private news service quoted Taliban sources as saying Masood's forces had retreated into the Panjsher after dynamiting the entrance to the valley.

There was no immediate comment from the opposition on the day's events.

Independent sources in Kabul said hundreds of civilians fled surrounding districts as the Taliban troops advanced into Charikar.

'Taliban troops are in Charikar and they have also advanced northwards and are on the edge of Jabul Saraj,' one source in Kabul said earlier.

Jabul Saraj is strategically important as it guards access to the Salang Tunnel on the main Salang highway that links Kabul with northern Afghanistan.

It is also located close to Gulbahar district which sits at the mouth of Masood's Panjsher Valley bastion.

Independent sources said combined dead and wounded figures for both sides from five days of renewed fighting were well in excess of 1,000. 'The number is probably closer to 1,500 by now,' one foreign aid worker said.

AIP said at least 28 Masood soldiers died and many were wounded in the fighting for Charikar. The AIP put the Taliban losses at five dead.

It said the Islamic militia also captured 130 opposition fighters and seized a large quantity of arms and ammunition in the city.

A local journalist said 'Bagram air base and Charikar town are under firm and complete control of the Taliban.'

The Islamic militia seized back the airbase, north of Kabul, after capturing

and then losing it again within hours on Sunday.

'Masood forces have retreated into the Panjsher valley. There was not much fighting and the Taliban entered Charikar without any resistance early in the morning after Masood pulled out.'

He said Charikar was like a 'ghost town' with all the shops closed and no civilians on the streets. Normally around 30,000 to 40,000 people live there.

'The advance has forced hundreds of civilians to flee. Many are heading for Kabul and some, particularly Masood supporters, will head north or retreat into the Panjsher valley,' one foreign aid worker said.

The journalist added the Taliban have gone beyond Charikar to Pul-i-Matak, 70 kilometres north of Kabul. Bagram was also totally under Taliban control, he said.

The capture of the Masood stronghold and the airport was a major gain for the Taliban which launched a summer offensive last week. The Islamic militia control more than 80 percent of Afghanistan.

Masood is the only obstacle to complete control.

The offensive came almost immediately after peace efforts by the United Nations failed to find a political resolution to the Afghan civil war.

On Sunday the militia made significant gains by pushing the Kabul frontlines back 25 kilometres to the southern edge of Charikar and Bagram airbase, about 50 kilometres north of the capital.

AIP said the Taliban overran several northern towns on Sunday including Guldara, Shakardara, Istalif, Qarabagh and Farza. No comments were immediately available from the Taliban or the opposition spokesmen.

The Taliban have been waging a five year civil war against forces loyal to ethnic Tajik commander Masood who holds the northeast provinces.

Nafees Takkar adds: Habibullah, First Secretary of Afghan embassy in Islam-

abad, told *The Nation* on Monday that Taliban forces have captured Mehmude Raqi—capital of Kapisa province, Charikar—capital of Parwan province, Gulbahar and Jabul Siraj, at the doorsteps of Panjsher Valley. Taliban have already strengthened their positions at Charikar and Bagram airbase.

The frontlines are now positioned about 70 kilometers far from the Afghan capital, Habibullah said. "Our forces can now easily hit Panjsher Valley with rockets from Mehmude Raqi," he said.

Habibullah, First Secretary of the Afghan Embassy got the latest fighting position from Taliban high authorities in Kabul. "Yes, I have a constant contact with Kabul," he said.

He said Taliban's quick advance towards Panjsher valley has been stopped for the time being due to destruction of a bridge situated on the mouth of a mountain pass leading to the valley. The bridge called Pol-i-Mutack was destroyed by Taliban forces, Habibullah said, to obstruct Taliban's movement towards Panjsher.

"The fall of Panjsher is now imminent," he said. He was hopeful of more gains for Taliban and more losses for the opposition forces in the coming few days. Ghairat Baheer, a former commander of Hizb-i-Islami of Engineer Gulbadin Hikmatyar, now based in Islamabad, also said that after the capture of Mehmude Raqi, Panjsher could possibly fall to Taliban. He, however, said military positions in Afghanistan always remained unpredictable. "If Taliban can advance they can also retreat," he said.

"For our side, we, however, think that fighting will not resolve the Afghan issue," Baheer said. Taliban should, rather, involve all the Afghans in consultations to restore the rule of law in the war-torn Afghanistan, he said.

A spokesman for the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan led by Pir Gholani also predicted fall of Panjsher Valley to Taliban. He was not sure that when Taliban will capture the valley, locked in the small hills adjacent to the Hindukush peak series, National Islamic Front is a pro-King Zahir group.

Former governor of eastern provinces including Nangrahar and Kunar, Haji Qadeer, however, told BBC Pashtu Service that their troops were still occupying positions on the hill tops of Salang in the north-east, about 90 kilometers, of Kabul. He said their forces were in a striking distance. Haji Qadeer forms part of the Anti-Taliban Northern Alliance.

APP from Islamabad adds: Foreign Office Spokesman on Monday rejected allegations leveled by former President of Afghanistan Burhanuddin Rabbani that Pakistan's forces were meddling in the war-shattered country.

NATION

13 AUG 1999

Masood retreats to Panjsher, losing two towns

CHARIKAR (Afghanistan), Aug 2: Opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masood and his fighters retreated to their Panjsher valley stronghold on Monday after the Taliban forces captured two key towns and an air base.

The Taliban captured the strategically important towns of Charikar, 60kms from Kabul, and Mahmud-i-Raqi, capital of nearby Kapisa province, after weekend fighting which gave them Masood's Bagram air base, a major prize.

Thousands of Taliban fighters on tanks, armoured personnel carriers and four-wheel drive pickups headed north towards the Panjsher valley in pursuit of Masood and his fighters, less than a week into a summer offensive aimed at silencing him.

Masood, an ethnic Tajik and military commander of the government the Taliban toppled three years ago, is the last major hurdle facing the Taliban in its drive to gain total domination of the country.

The fall of Charikar, which resembled a ghost town on Monday morning, gave the Taliban control of the whole Shomali region and pushed back front lines only 25kms from Kabul which allowed Masood to rocket the capital for the past three years.

Charikar is only about 30kms from Panjsher and lies on the main road that links the south and north of the country through the Salang pass in the Hindukush mountains.

Masood holds heights around Salang, which has a narrow link through the mountains to the Panjsher, his birthplace and the site of three failed Taliban attacks in recent years.

"Masood has blown up the entrance of Panjsher and has

retreated to the valley," one Taliban commander told Taliban Information Minister Mullah Amir Khan Muttaqi, who drove to Charikar with Kabul-based reporters.

Muttaqi denied media reports and opposition charges that thousands of Pakistani and Arab recruits were involved in the capture of Charikar, capital of Parwan province.

"Our foreign and domestic enemies have been waging a propaganda war that our victories were made possible with the participation of Pakistani and Arab fighters," Muttaqi said.

"They want to give the credit and honour of our gains to foreigners. It is not true. Can you see any foreigners here?" he asked journalists who visited the deserted town.

The journalists saw only Taliban fighters and said the town was barely damaged, suggesting that Masood's defenders had fled the Taliban's pre-dawn advance.

All shops were shut and the only civilians were a few perplexed women leaving the city. The bodies of half a dozen young men lay on the sides of streets adjacent to the city.

The Taliban mounted the offensive days after the end of inconclusive UN-backed peace talks. The Taliban say Masood should surrender and join their administration but Masood wants an interim government grouping all factions and ethnic groups.

The Taliban argue that complete domination of the country should reinforce their claim to be recognized as the legal government of Afghanistan. It is viewed as such only by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

—Reuters

New attacks launched on Taliban posts

KABUL, Aug 17: The Afghan opposition said on Tuesday it had launched a series of attacks on Taliban forces in a bid to pile pressure on the militia and draw its troops away from Kabul.

Opposition spokesman Abdullah said 80 Taliban soldiers were killed in an attack in the eastern provinces of Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar near the Pakistan border and the Khyber Pass.

A further 12 Taliban died during a strike on militia positions in central Ghor province where the opposition temporarily held the provincial capital of Chaghchharan, he said.

"One of the aims of these operations is to draw Taliban soldiers away from Kabul front lines and to put more pressure on the militia," Abdullah said.

The Taliban have pushed the Kabul front lines back to 50kms north of the capital since it launched its summer offensive against forces loyal to Ahmad Shah Masood on July 28.

However, Taliban authorities said opposition strikes in the east had been repulsed.

"A plot by the enemy was neutralized in Kunar and Nangarhar and the perpetrators were punished," the militia's official broadcaster Radio Shariat said.

Abdullah said fighting was heavy on Tuesday morning near Asadabad, in central Kunar.

"These operations prove the Taliban lie, their claims that they have brought security to Afghanistan. People rise against them whenever they can seize the opportunity," he said.

The Kabul front lines were quiet throughout the day.—AFP

DAWN

18 AUG 1999

DAWN

03 AUG 1999

Taliban capture post bordering Tajikistan

By Nafees Takkar

ISLAMABAD - Taliban Tuesday captured Sher Khan port bordering Tajikistan and Imam Sahib district of the northern province of Kunduz as guns remained silent in the north of Kabul, Taliban embassy officials confirmed here.

The Tuesday's gains gave Taliban the only remaining port of Sher Khan on river Oxus so far held by the opposition forces, which also led to the total fall of the province of Kunduz. The provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan, both under the control of the opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood, are bordering the Kunduz province.

Taliban captured the other port called Hairathan on the same river, bordering Uzbekistan one year ago in their offensive against former commander of northern provinces General Rashid Dostum. The two dryports at Turghundi on Afghan-Turkmenistan border and Islam Qilla on Afghan-Iran border were quite earlier captured by Taliban.

Taliban's latest victories has brought them in direct geographical links with three Central Asian Republics, namely, Uzbekistan at Hairathan, Tajikistan at Sher Khan port and Turkmenistan at Turghundi.

"The advance march was launched on Tuesday from Kunduz centre towards Imam Sahib district and later towards Sher Khan port and both were captured successfully," said Habibullah, First Secretary of Afghan embassy in Islamabad. The two ports on river Oxus are now under the control of Taliban, he added. Tajik border town called Qizil Qilla can now be seen from this side of the Afghan-Tajik border.

Imam Sahib is the hometown of Gulbadin Hekmatyar, leader of the Hizb-e-Islami of Afghanistan. Sher Khan port is about 30 kilometers in the south west of Imam Sahib town, said the Afghan embassy official. From proper Kunduz town, Sher Khan port lies at a distance of about 60 kilometers.

On Tuesday, Taliban took a breather in the north of Kabul and did not order their troops to enter the pass leading to Panjsher valley. They have reached to the mouth of the mountainous pass which could land the invaders in the Panjsher town.

Taliban officials say the march on Panjsher was halted for the time being. Their movement towards the stronghold of Masood is believed to have been stopped due to the destruction of a bridge called Pul-i-Mutack, situated on the pass.

Taliban forces captured Mehmude Ragi - Capital of Kapisa province, Charikar - Capital of Parwan province, Gulbahar and Jablus Siraj, at the door-

steps of Panjsher valley, earlier on Monday.

Their frontlines are now positioned about 70 kilometers far from the Afghan Capital and are at a striking distance from Panjsher valley.

Since the launching of the fresh summer offensive on Wednesday last by Taliban, the Opposition Northern Alliance lost three provinces—Parwan, Kapisa and Kanduz. Taliban pushed Masood troops as back as 75 kilometers towards their stronghold, Panjsher from Capital Kabul during the week-long fighting. Only one week ago Masood forces were as close as 25 kilometer to Kabul.

The fighting was also expensive in terms of casualties. The unofficial reports say so far over 1000 people were killed in the fighting living more as injured. Both sides claim of incurring heavy casualties upon each other.

100,000 civilians flee

AFP adds: At least 100,000 civilians have fled the advancing Taliban causing a widespread refugee crisis.

The opposition claimed 250,000 refugees had fled to the Panjsher Valley where anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Masood remains the last obstacle to total Taliban domination of Afghanistan.

"There are a bare minimum 100,000 refugees in the valley who have fled the fighting and this is a very big humanitarian crisis. The civilian population is maybe 300,000 so it could be much higher," one western source said.

The exodus follows six days of the Taliban's summer offensive which has forced Masood to retreat from frontlines north of Kabul.

Backed by tanks, artillery and infantry, the militia has marched through Bagram airbase, taken Charikar and Jabul Saraj with the opposition conceding their rivals were now closing in on the highly important Salang Tunnel.

The capture of the strategic Bagram airbase 'does not constitute a major loss ... since we stopped using it a long time ago,' Masood insisted in an overnight satellite telephone interview with a Beirut Arabic daily.

The airbase 'could easily be targeted with heavy weapons by the Taliban' so the opposition had long relied on the 'safer' option of reinforcing its positions by land, the opposition commander told Al-Mustaqbal.

Masood said his commanders had ordered a retreat in a bid to save the lives of civilians caught up in the heavy fighting.

Masood blamed intervention by Pakistani and Arab forces for the new advances by the Taliban.

NATION

04 AUG 1999

On Friday, Taliban chief Mulla Mohammad Omar denied Pakistani soldiers were involved in the militia's offensive and Islamabad also denied the charges.

Masood said the irregular forces fighting alongside the Taliban included supporters of Afghanistan-based Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, who is on Washington's most wanted list for his suspected role in two deadly bomb attacks on US embassies in east Africa last year. Independent sources said the collapse of Masood's frontlines had triggered a flight of civilians who feared Taliban retribution for supporting Masood. As an ethnic Tajik Masood enjoys popular support among the Tajik dominated area.

"Civilians are continuing to flee. At least 200,000 people fled into the Panjsher within 24 hours. Afghanistan has never seen anything like that," opposition spokesman Abdullah said.

"There are now 250,000 refugees in the valley. They have little water and have had no food for two days and there is nothing our people can do," an opposition commander said from the Panjsher, appealing for international help.

In Kabul, there were further reports of civilians fleeing the fighting in tens of thousands after the militia told locals in areas previously held by Masood to leave until the militia could secure the area.

"They are streaming down the Old Road and seeking refuge with relatives, friends and anyone in Kabul who can help," the independent source said.

Abdullah said the Taliban were near the Salang Tunnel which links the country's north and south through the Hindu Kush at an altitude of 3,300 metres while the opposition was preparing for fresh assaults in the far north.

If the Taliban take the tunnel, this would enable the militia to link its troops from the south with the north and allow for a mass assault on the north.

Abdullah said Taliban commanders were expected to attack the northern city of Taloqan and attempt to sweep across the north from west to east and cut the opposition's supply routes to the Panjsher from Tajikistan.

"We expect this but so far it hasn't happened," Abdullah said.

The AIP also reported Tuesday the Taliban had captured Hairatan port on the Amu Darya (Oxus River) that forms the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Abdullah denied the report and no independent confirmation was immediately available.

0.25m Afghans flee fearing reprisals

KABUL, Aug 3: Afghan opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masood urged Tuesday that the world to help a quarter of a million Afghans he said had fled the troops of the Taliban in the Panjshir valley.

"Around 250,000 civilians have come to Panjshir because of the fighting. They have no shelter or food. We appeal for urgent international aid for these people," Dr Abdullah, Masood's chief spokesman, said in Islamabad.

Abdullah said in 10 months — its first major offensive — the Taliban's forces have committed gross human rights abuses against civilians in the past. What guarantees are there they will spare civilians this time?

Abdullah's appeal was issued as the Taliban pushed further into opposition territory and captured Gulbahaar, Masood's second most important bastion after Panjshir.

The militia reached the Salang pass which divides the north and south of Afghanistan, independent sources said.

Masood still controlled the tunnel which enabled him to supply his forces in the Panjshir, they said. The Taliban said he blew up the entrance to the valley, a natural fortress which the Taliban has failed to capture in three previous attempts.

Masood also controls two north-eastern provinces but reliable sources said the Taliban overcame strong resistance to occupy the town of Shir Khan Bandar on the border of Tajikistan, and was moving in on opposition-held areas.

The fall of Charikar, 60kms north of Kabul, pushed back the opposition's front lines which had enabled Masood to fire rockets on the capital for the past three years.

The end of the rocket attacks enabled the United Nations and International Committee of the Red Cross to resume aid flights to Kabul, where they tend hundreds of other.

The Taliban, which has a grip on about 90 percent of Afghanistan, want control of the whole country to back their claim as the legitimate government. Only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates now recognise the Taliban.

The international community has withheld recognition, preferring a broad-based government of all factions and ethnic groups to end the cycle of one group dominating the other. — Reuters

thousands of people impoverished by a 20-year cycle of factional bloodshed.

The Taliban mounted the offensive five days after the end of inconclusive UN-backed peace talks. The Taliban say Masood should surrender and join their administration.

The Taliban wants an interim government grouping all factions and ethnic groups.

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04 AUG 1999

Taliban claim new victories in Kunduz

Omar offers amnesty to opposition forces

KABUL (AFP) - The Taliban's supreme leader urged the opposition to surrender Wednesday as fresh fighting erupted in north Afghanistan with a major offensive to capture the whole country entering the second week.

Fighting was reported around the newly established frontlines about 100 kilometres north of Kabul while the militia claimed new victories in the northern province of Kunduz.

In an open letter to opposition forces the militia's chief Mulla Mohammad Omar offered an amnesty to the opposition.

'All those people who are still with the opposition are requested not to stand against their religion or country and lay down their arms.

'If they give up the resistance I declare an amnesty for them according to which their lives and property will be safe,' Omar said.

Tens of thousands of people are said to be fleeing the fighting, flooding into the capital Kabul and other areas in search of a safe haven.

Opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood, who has fought a five year civil

war against the militia, blew up the entrance to the Panjsher Valley on Monday to block the Taliban from his main base.

But, the militia, which controls 80 per cent of Afghanistan claimed it had taken the district of Imam Sahib in the far north.

Taliban information minister Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi said troops were securing areas around Imam Sahib and the border areas between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

'We have also captured Sher Khan Bander,' Muttaqi said. Sher Khan Bander is a port town on the Amu River which borders Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Analysts expect the Taliban to launch the second wave of its summer campaign eastwards from Imam Sahib and target the provincial city of Taloqan which straddles key supply routes heading south to the Panjsher Valley. Its aim is to wipe out the last pockets of resistance to its rule.

Opposition general, Sayed Anwari disputed the Taliban's claim saying the

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militia had been repulsed from Imam Sahib while opposition troops were holding the high ground around Jabul Seraj. 'While Jabel Saraj remains a virtual no man's land, the Taliban militia is unable to advance further northwards.

'Their troops were repulsed from the district of Imam Sahib and surroundings districts. Previous frontlines remain intact,' Anwari said.

Taliban accused of forcing people to leave homes

Meanwhile, the opposition and Kabul residents accused the militia of forcing people to leave their homes and moving them by bus to eastern Jalalabad. 'This is very serious. The Taliban are forcing people out of their houses while claiming to protect the people, 300,000 people have left fearing Taliban savagery,' opposition spokesman Abdullah said.

Rejecting the opposition claim, Taliban's Minister of Information Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi said 1,800 families

were taken to the eastern province of Nangarhar to safeguard them against fighting.

He said the transfer was in keeping with international laws covering civilians in war zones and was done because the opposition had used civilians and their homes as 'human shields'.

The families have settled in Sar Shahi, a desert camp out of the provincial capital Jalalabad which used to house tens of thousands of people displaced from Kabul in the 1994 Mujahideen factional fighting, he said.

'Some 1,800 families have so far reached Jalalabad and the same number have been brought to Kabul where special places will be allocated for them,' the minister said.

Independent sources say a further 100,000 people had scattered across the opposition-held Panjsher Valley.

However, independent sources said Taliban motives were based on securing the civilian population in safe areas and away from front lines to the north

of Kabul where the militia has over-run opposition positions.

Muttaqi said the move was temporary while Jalalabad local authorities had provided food, water and security measures for them. He reassured refugees in the Panjsher Valley they could return to Kabul safely.

It is a 'legal' practice in the 'particular military situation' and does not target any group in particular, he said when asked why the families were being re-located.

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Taliban chief offers amnesty to Masood forces

ISLAMABAD, Aug 4: The supreme leader of Afghanistan's Taliban movement on Wednesday issued a thinly-veiled appeal to forces loyal to his last real foe, Ahmad Shah Masood, to defect to advancing Taliban troops.

"The life and property of those joining (the Taliban) will be protected and those opposing (us) will be regarded as rebels acting in the interest of internal and external enemies," Mullah Mohammad Omar said in a statement.

It was issued through the independent Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) news agency as thousands of Taliban fighters closed in on the last strongholds of Masood in the Panjsher valley and northeastern provinces.

The Taliban launched a major offensive to crush Masood one week ago and have captured key ground held by Masood, military commander of the government the Taliban ousted in 1996, in an advance on several fronts across Afghanistan.

Omar said the Taliban's sole purpose was to impose Islamic law across the country.

The statement, issued against a background of warnings of ethnic reprisals by both sides, said the Taliban were not motivated by revenge.

"Our military movement is not for revenge. Masood, (ousted president Burhanuddin) Rabbani and (their ally Abdurrah Rasul) Sayyaf are using you for their own interests. You should take benefit of the general amnesty and join the Islamic emirate (government)," the statement said.

Omar asked all his fighters to protect the life and property of opponents joining their ranks and to treat prisoners of war well.

Masood, who has retreated into his Panjsher valley bastion, was the military commander of the government of Rabbani, who was chased from Kabul when the Taliban seized power three years ago. Sayyaf is a Masood associate.

Western military analysts said they expected the Taliban to try to win over Masood's supporters in the northeastern provinces of Badakshan, Kunduz and Takhar rather than extend their forces on distant fronts.—Reuters

Taliban attack across Kabul frontlines

KHAIR KHANA PASS (Afghanistan), Aug 11: Afghanistan's ruling Taliban launched a pre-dawn strike across front lines to the north of Kabul and captured two strategic districts, militia sources and reports said on Wednesday.

Taliban commanders here on the northern outskirts of Kabul said the districts of Sarai Khawaja and Kalakan, 35 kilometres north of Kabul, were captured from forces loyal to commander Ahmad Shah Masood.

"We smashed through their frontlines around 8:00am and advanced on Kalakan," one commander told AFP.

In Kabul, the heavy artillery shelling across the front was clearly audible for about four hours until it subsided around 8:00am.

The militia's claim was backed by a report from Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) but disputed by the opposition.

AIP said the fighting was heavy and at least 13 troops from both sides were killed. Another 24 were injured.

The militia also carried out a bombing raid on a Masood convoy about 70 kilometres north of Kabul, AIP said in a statement.

However, an opposition spokesman said the fighting was restricted to artillery duels and there were no changes to the front line.

"There was a lot of shelling but there was no infantry engagements and the front lines have not changed. The Taliban have not advanced," he said.—AFP

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Masood forces recapture key towns

ISLAMABAD, Aug 5: Anti-Taliban fighters in Afghanistan recaptured their Bagram airbase and key towns in a surprise counter-attack against the Islamic militia, a Taliban official and independent sources said on Thursday.

The unexpected counter-strike was launched by the forces of opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masood overnight and forced the Taliban to retreat from Bagram and the towns of Charikar, Jablun Seraj, Mahmood-i-Raqi and Gulbahar.

"The opposition forces attacked last night and we feared civilian casualties and retreated. It was a tactical retreat," the Taliban's Information Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi told the independent Afghan Islamic Press news agency.

"We will soon start our clean-up operation in a very organized way," the Taliban official said.

Bagram and the recaptured towns lie in a belt of land, some 80kms north of Kabul, which Masood's forces have controlled for more than two years, denying the Taliban complete domination of the broken state.

Independent sources said Taliban fighters were retreating towards Kabul along the same roads they advanced just over one week ago in an attempt to crush Masood, a veteran military commander who controls northeastern provinces.

"The Taliban forces would appear to be in retreat along a number of fronts and in some disarray," said one source.

There was no independent confirmation of opposition claims that up to 1,000 Taliban fighters and their Pakistani and Arab backers had been killed by a counter-attack

launched by Masood from his Panjsher valley stronghold.

In New Delhi, a spokesman for the government the Taliban toppled three years ago — forcing Masood to flee to the Panjsher valley — said Taliban casualties were extremely high.

Masood Khalili told Reuters: "I have been told that it cannot be less than 1,000 wounded or killed," adding that many Taliban tanks and weapons had been captured.

Bagram was the first target of the Taliban offensive. It is Masood's main military supply line and sits close to the Panjsher valley, a natural fortress from which the ethnic Tajik has led three years of resistance to Taliban rule.

The Taliban want to crush Masood to extend their control of 90 per cent of the country, to reinforce their demand to be recognized as the legitimate government.

Opposition spokesmen have accused the mainly ethnic Pashtun Taliban of forcing an exodus of Tajiks from battle zones, but the Taliban said it had only asked civilians to shift to safety.

The Taliban have scrapped plans to move women, children and the elderly who fled the fighting to a makeshift camp near Jalalabad on the border with Pakistan, after many broke down in tears on learning that they would be transferred there.

Independent sources said the militia would return some 8,000 displaced people already in the Sar Aahi camp to Kabul, and that other people fleeing the fighting would be housed in the gutted former Soviet embassy in a Kabul suburb.—Reuters

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■ Retakes Bagram airport, is 30 kms away from capital: Taliban retreated because of locals uprising: 500 killed

Opposition recaptures all areas north of Kabul

By Nafees Takkar

ISLAMABAD - Afghanistan's opposition Northern Alliance Thursday recaptured almost all the areas north of Kabul it had lost to the ruling Taliban in its week long summer offensive, Taliban Information Minister's office confirmed from Kabul.

But the official in Amir Khan Muttuqi's office said Taliban retreated from the newly captured areas because of uprisings by local people.

"The people started firing from inside their homes. Taliban pulled back from there to avoid heavy civilian casualties," he told *The Nation*.

Taliban lost Mahmoud Raqi, capital of Kapisa, Charikar, capital of Parawan province, Nijrab, Jablun Siraj and Gulbahar at the mouth of Panjsher valley, a stronghold of opposition commander

Ahmed Shah Masood.

The Taliban official claimed, however, that their fighters were still holding mountain tops in areas close to the opposition positions.

Thursday's fighting brought the front-line from the opening to Panjsher valley to Mir Bacha Kot, 30 kilometres to the north of Afghanistan's capital Kabul, the Taliban official said.

The opposition also captured the lone Bagram airport claimed Ghairat Baheer, a close aide of a Taliban opposed leader, Gulbadin Hikmatyar.

This is for the third time that Taliban advances towards Panjsher valley have met with failure.

The previous two occasions were in 1996 and 1998 when Taliban were dealt with heavy casualties. This time, however, the Taliban claim they lost five to six men at Jablun Siraj.

The Taliban have maintained their

hold on areas they had captured in Kunduz province.

Earlier on Tuesday Taliban took Sher Khan port bordering Tajikistan and Imam Sahib district of the northern province of Kunduz.

The Tuesday's gains had given Taliban the only remaining port of Sher Khan on river Oxus so far held by the opposition forces, which also led to the total fall of the province of Kunduz. The provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan, both under the control of the opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood, are bordering the Kunduz province.

AFP adds: Earlier Thursday opposition forces claimed to have advanced to within 50 kilometres of Kabul in a heavy counter attack which they say has left up to 500 Islamic militiamen dead.

The opposition were supported by thousands of men who just two days ago

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Taliban shore up Kabul defence

KABUL (AFP) - Taliban troops were shoring up defences around the capital Kabul on Saturday as the Afghan opposition closed in around the twin districts of Tagab and Nijrab, north-east of the capital, reports said.

Taliban Information Minister Mulla Amir Khan Muttuqi said soldiers had been re-deployed from the north and central provinces to the Afghan capital but said the militia had held onto key heights on the front lines.

"We still hold the strategic heights like the hill tops to the east of Bagram airbase. We control Barikaw Bridge close to Bagram," he said.

"More troops have been deployed around the Kabul belt and in Kabul."

Ten days ago the Taliban launched its summer offensive from Tagab and quickly took nearby Nijrab in a battery of artillery and tank shelling, aerial bombardments and infantry engagements.

Over the next week the militia scored a stunning series of victories and forced the opposition to abandon Bagram Airbase, 50 kilometres north of Kabul, and retreat into the heavily fortified Panjsher

Valley.

But on Thursday opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood launched a counterstrike and has since regained nearly all territory lost to the militia and pushed the front lines back to within 30 kilometres of Kabul.

In Kabul, signs the militia was bolstering the city's defences were obvious.

Hundreds of well-armed Taliban were cruising the streets in four-wheel drive pick-ups while authorities had erected a series of check posts and were searching for illegal arms and munitions.

Residents who had ventured beyond the front lines to check on relatives and friends said the situation was calm.

"I went to Deh Sabz Pass and people were relaxed and drinking tea," one local resident said.

An opposition spokesman said overnight fighting focussed on Tagab and Nijrab while Taliban fighter jets had carried out four sorties on Masood's bases in the Panjsher Valley.

"There were civilians killed in the bombing raids but we're still assessing the damage," he told AFP. "At Nijrab and Tagab both districts will soon be back under our control."

The opposition spokesman said be-

tween 800 and 1,000 Taliban fighters were killed in the counter offensive.

After a five-year civil war, the ethnic Pashtoon Taliban control most of Afghanistan and is attempting to capture the northeast provinces held by Masood, his ethnic Tajiks and an alliance of Uzbeks, Hazaras and Turkmen.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Friday appealed to the six countries bordering Afghanistan to honour a pledge to keep out of the civil war, lest it become a "trans-national conflict."

"Even as a purely internal conflict, the Afghan crisis is a clear menace to regional peace and stability," Annan said in a statement.

He said he was disturbed by reports "that there are now thousands of non-Afghan nationals taking part in the fighting."

And China's foreign ministry on Saturday reportedly said it regretted the escalation of fighting in Afghanistan and urged the two sides to reach a settlement.

Beijing, which shares a border with northern Afghanistan, fears that a decisive Taliban victory in Afghanistan's civil war could risk destabilising the three ex-Soviet Muslim-dominated republics - Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan - on its borders.

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Opposition recaptures all areas north of Kabul

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sought refuge with the opposition.

Anti-Taliban General Sayed Anwari said those Taliban who resisted were killed immediately and the militia had lost nearly half the area it captured in the first week of its summer offensive.

Anwari said 250 Taliban were taken prisoner, including large numbers of Arabs and Pakistanis, and 10 tanks and 15 artillery pieces were captured.

'By late afternoon Jabul Seraj, Charikar and elsewhere were completely under our control. Bagram has been cut off from Taliban supply line and its fall is inevitable,' Anwari said.

The battle zone begins 50 kilometres north of Kabul and stretches from Bagram airbase and Charikar along the Northern Highway to Jabul Seraj and Gulbahar at the start of the opposition-held Panjsher Valley.

At least 100,000 civilians fled into the Panjsher Valley as advancing Taliban troops swept down the highway earlier this week and forced Masood to retreat into the Panjsher.

There are no foreign aid workers left and civilians who stayed behind were evacuated by Taliban commanders to Kabul. Information minister Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi said this was done in accordance with international law to ensure the safety of non-combatants.

However, independent sources said male refugees had joined Masood's ranks after they learned the militia had separated women and children from their husbands in Kabul.

Women and children were then relocated to Jalalabad in the east.

One Afghan analyst from Kabul University described the battle as tribal, saying: 'In Afghanistan you can be forgiven for committing a massacre but never touch women and children.'

From the Panjsher spokesman for French foreign aid group Medecins du Monde (MDM), Julian Bousac, said Masood's fighters had been concentrat-

ed in the lower part of the valley from where the offensive was launched.

'It appeared the opposition had launched its counter offensive. Now we hear that Jabul Seraj has fallen and perhaps Charikar as well but it's impossible to confirm from here,' he told AFP by telephone.

The opposition's main spokesman Abdullah said opposition troops had moved out of the heavily fortified Panjsher Valley late Wednesday and taken Gulbahar near the entrance of the valley before advancing west to the Northern Highway at Jabul Seraj.

He said a large number of Taliban had fled into the surrounding mountains while opposition ranks were bolstered by refugees in the Panjsher who wanted to recapture their homes.

Bousac said most refugees had since left the valley with mostly women and children heading northwards towards Takhar province.

'They have nothing and there is no news of them. The mosques and schools were full of women and lost children, there was no means of providing food for them,' he said.

Abdullah said that an opposition plea made earlier this week for help in coping with the mostly Tajik refugees had fallen on deaf ears.

'We made the plea and no one helped us. No one did anything. So we had to do something,' he told AFP.

The Islamic militia had earlier overrun the areas after it launched a major offensive on July 28 in a bid to neutralise Masood, the last potent military rival.

On Wednesday Taliban chief Mulla Mohammad Omar asked the opponents to surrender and offered a general amnesty after his militia's sweeping gains north of Kabul.

US plotting to end Taliban rule:

JUI

Jamiatul Ulema-e-Islam has charged the United States with plotting to end the Taliban Govt on the pretext of at-

tack against Osama bin Laden (wanted by Washington for his alleged involvement in bomb attacks on US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August, 1998).

'We are absolutely not ready to accept your (US) argument that your attack is against Osama bin Laden (who lives in Afghanistan as guest of the Islamic Emirate). The US wants end of an Islamic government under its pretext.'

'Therefore, if you took such steps for end of an Islamic government obviously you may invite difficulty for yourself. For this purpose, the US will have to take initiative for changing its attitude,' warned Maulana Fazlur Rehman Amir of JUI-F in an interview with BBC Thursday.

The US has sharply reacted over statement of Maulana Fazlur Rehman that American citizens will be attacked if US attacked Afghanistan to search Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden.

The JUI (F) Amir who met American diplomats in Islamabad on Tuesday said he made it very clear to them (US diplomats) that normal positions exists till the US does not attack, otherwise 'we will stand by our stand. If we are not safe from the Americans on our own territory, then how the Americans will be safe on our territory.'

He referred to reports in Pakistani newspapers last month that the US was once again going to attack Afghanistan. He said, after his party expressed severe reaction in this regard. The US diplomats called on him and wanted to get record their protest or concern that the US Government felt concerned over our statements. We formally rejected it and made clear to them that you would have to follow path of negotiations instead of force, but the talks should also not be under the cover of cruise missile. 'Washington had carried out cruise missiles attacks on the hideouts of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in August last year.'

Taliban, rivals exchange fire near Kabul

DAWN 07 AUG 1999

KABUL, Aug 6: Fighters from Afghanistan's ruling Taliban movement were locked in an artillery exchange just north of Kabul with forces loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood on Friday morning, residents said.

The burst of shells in the plain some 25 km north of Kabul brought the war-weary capital back in rocketing range after Masood's forces launched a surprise counter-attack earlier in the week to the Taliban.

The latest fighting comes a day after UN Security Council members condemned the Taliban for launching the new military offensive and demanded an immediate halt and held out the threat of sanctions.

Taliban fighters prevented journalists from going to the area of the latest fighting.

An opposition spokesman said the old front lines on the New Roads about 25 kilometres north of the capital Kabul had been secured as the Taliban conceded their losses.

"We have now captured all territories. The previous front lines will soon be re-established and we will soon decide our next course of action," said the Taliban spokesman, who declined to be named.

Independent sources said they believed the situation on front lines was tense but quiet with many of the militia's troops returning to Kabul where they were expected to regroup.

Taliban Information Minister Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi admitted the militia had withdrawn its forces from Gulbahaar, Jabul Seraj, Mahmoud-i-Raqi and Charikar.

But he said the retreat was "technical" and he vowed the militia would launch a new and better planned operation soon.

Muttaqi said the militia withdrew from the areas in line with a decision made by its military council.

There are no precise casualty figures for both sides since the fighting now in its second week, but Unconfirmed reports put the number at more than 1,000 dead and more wounded.

The Taliban acknowledged the loss of Bagram and the other bases years of resistance to the Taliban is back entrenched in his old positions.

The Taliban operation, the first major one in 10 months, included several thousand fighters, backed by tanks, helicopter gunships and jet fighters, and was aimed at capturing the 10 per cent of the country's foodstuffs in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as well as blankets and tents which could be used for temporary emergencies. — Reuters/AFP

Bodies of 3 Pakistanis received at Pak-Afghan border

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR — Bodies of three Pakistanis which were received at Torkham on Pak-Afghan border have been despatched to their native villages. Reports reveals that two among three victims belong to Bannu while the third one belongs to the Punjab province.

The reports from Torkham further said that the bodies of Safer son of Omer Shaheen from Bannu, Maulana Mohammad Ishaq son of Mohammad Karim from Bannu and Mohammad Naveed from Shahdara, Lahore were airlifted from Gulbahaar to north of Kabul through a military helicopter.

The bodies were handed over to Taliban stalwarts in Torkham and later on boarded on wagons so as to despatch

to their native villages.

The reports said that Taliban leader had decided to send the bodies of those Pakistanis people to their native villages whose identities have confirmed. In this connection, special cards have been issued to the volunteers before leaving for the war fronts.

It is learnt that a large number of people who are the close relatives of the Pakistani students and volunteers are everyday visiting Taliban office at Torkham to know about the fate of their youngsters.

At Torkham, the Taliban office doesn't possess any record of such Pakistanis but registering complaints of these Pakistani visitors and convey such data to their offices in Kabul and Jalalabad.

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Taliban shore up Kabul defence

KABUL, Aug 7: Taliban troops were shoring up defences around Kabul on Saturday as the Afghan opposition closed in around the twin districts of Tagab and Nijrab, northeast of the capital, reports said.

Taliban Information Minister Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi said soldiers had been redeployed from the north and central provinces to the Afghan capital but said the militia had held onto key heights on the front lines.

"We still hold the strategic heights like the hill tops to the east of Bagram Airbase. We control Barikaw bridge close to Bagram," he said.

"More troops have been deployed around the Kabul belt and in Kabul."

Ten days ago the Taliban launched its summer offensive and scored a series of victories.

But on Thursday opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood launched a counter strike and has since regained nearly all territory lost to the militia and pushed the front lines back to within 30 kilometres of Kabul.

In Kabul, signs the militia was bolstering the city's defences were obvious.

Hundreds of well-armed Taliban were cruising the streets in four-wheel drive pick-ups while authorities had erected a series of checkpoints and were searching for illegal arms and munitions.

Residents who had ventured beyond the front lines to check on relatives and friends said the situation was calm.

"I went to Deh Sabz Pass and people were relaxed and drinking tea," one local resident said.

An opposition spokesman said overnight fighting focused on Tagab

and Nijrab while Taliban fighter jets had carried out four sorties on Masood's bases in the Panjsher Valley.

"There were civilians killed in the bombing raids but we're still assessing the damage," he told AFP. "At Nijrab and Tagab both districts will soon be back under our control."

The opposition spokesman said between 800 and 1,000 Taliban fighters were killed in the counter offensive including "many Pakistani nationals and Arabs".

"We are trying to identify as many of the Pakistan bodies as possible and gather as much evidence as we can to present to the international community to validate our claims of Pakistan involvement," he said.

Independent sources say the number of dead and wounded for both sides was close to 4,000.—AFP

Anti-Taliban forces make several strategic gains

KABUL (AFP) - Afghan opposition forces have recaptured several strategic northern towns, an opposition spokesman said Sunday, as the ruling Taliban militia appeared to be shoring up defences in the capital Kabul.

Spokesman Mohammad Aref said forces loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood regained Dasht-i-Archi and Imam Saheb districts in the northern province of Kunduz and the port town of Sher Khan Bandar on the border with Tajikistan.

Aref, speaking by satellite telephone from Masood's Panjsher Valley stronghold, told AFP opposition fighters also repulsed a heavy attack by the Taliban on areas around Taloqan, in the northern province of Takhar.

"The fighting was very heavy and the attack was backed by Taliban jets, but they failed to have any gains," Aref said, adding the clashes had subsided.

"First we captured Dasht-i-Archi, then

Imam Saheb and Sher Khan Bandar after heavy fighting on Saturday."

Sher Khan Bandar is located on the Afghan side of the Amu Darya or Oxus River which forms the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. It faces Termez port in the former Soviet republic.

Aref also said pro-Masood soldiers also retook several strategic heights they had lost to Taliban troops in the Ghorband valley in the province of Parwan.

And he added that Taliban jets on Sunday carried out eight sorties on residential areas of Charikar and Gulbahar.

The three strategic locations were earlier seized by the Taliban in a major offensive that briefly dismantled Masood's frontlines north of Kabul with the fall of several towns in the nearby provinces of Parwan and Kapisa.

However, the opposition launched a

surprise counter-attack earlier this week driving the Taliban back to Kabul with heavy losses. Opposition sources said between 800 and 1,000 Taliban fighters were killed in the counter offensive.

While the opposition has declined to release its own casualty figures, independent sources have said the number of dead and wounded for both sides in 11 days of fighting was close to 4,000.

Meanwhile in Kabul, reports said the militia was bolstering the city's defences. Hundreds of well armed Taliban were seen cruising the streets in jeeps while the authorities erected special check points to search for illegal arms.

But sources also said the frontlines — now restored to within 30 kilometres of Kabul — were quiet on Sunday.

The Islamic Taliban militia last week scored a series of stunning victories and forced the opposition to abandon Bagram Airbase, 50 kilometres north of Kabul, and retreat into the heavily fortified Panjsher Valley.

But last Thursday Masood launched a counter strike and has since regained nearly all the territory he lost.

After a five-year civil war, the ethnic Pashtoon Taliban control most of Afghanistan and is attempting to capture the northeast provinces held by Masood, his ethnic Tajiks and an alliance of Uzbeks, Hazaras and Turkmen.

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08 AUG 1999

Opposition forces bury Taliban dead fighters

KABUL (AFP) - The Afghan opposition said Tuesday they had started burying hundreds of dead Taliban fighters after they failed to reach an agreement to send their remains home through the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Abdullah, spokesman for opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood, said the bodies of soldiers killed in the summer offensive had begun to decompose after lying exposed for five days.

"Our soldiers have started burying Taliban dead bodies in individual graves," Abdullah said. "We had to do this in order to avoid the outbreak of disease."

He said the remains were being interred in marked graves which would allow them to be removed and relocated at a later date if an agreement with the ICRC or Taliban authorities could be struck.

Most of the Taliban troops did not carry any identification documents, making it difficult to identify those who were killed after the militia launched its annual offensive on July 28, Abdullah said.

FRONTIER POST

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The Afghan opposition had said they would only allow the ICRC to transfer the bodies when the Taliban allowed the local refugees from Parwan and Kapisa provinces and the Shamali Plain, to return back home.

The Taliban lost these strategic areas north of Kabul last Thursday just a few days after the ruling militia had captured the battle zones and strategic villages from Masood.

But during its short hold on the area, militia soldiers shifted in buses hundreds of local families to the capital Kabul and the eastern city of Jalalabad, claiming their relocation was for the safety of non-combatants and in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Abdullah, spokesman for opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood, said the bodies of soldiers killed in the summer offensive had begun to decompose after lying exposed for five days.

Masood troops recapture Taliban posts

KABUL, Aug 8: Afghan opposition forces have recaptured an important port town on the border with Tajikistan and repulsed a heavy Taliban attack on their base in northern Afghanistan, an opposition spokesman said on Sunday.

Spokesman Mohammad Aref said forces loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood had recaptured Dasht-i-Archi and Imam Saheb districts and the port town of Sher Khan Bandar in the northern province of Kunduz on Saturday.

Aref, speaking by satellite telephone from Masood's Panjsher Valley stronghold, said opposition fighters had also repulsed a heavy attack by the Taliban militia on areas around Taloqan, in the northern province of Takhar.

"The fighting was very heavy and the attack was backed by losses," AFP

However, the opposition launched a surprise counter-attack earlier this week, driving the Taliban back to Kabul with heavy losses.—AFP

Taliban jets, but they failed to have any gains," Aref said, adding the clashes had subsided.

"First we captured Dasht-i-Archi, then Imam Saheb and Sher Khan Bandar after heavy fighting on Saturday."

Sher Khan Bandar is located on the Afghan side of the Amu Darya or Oxus River, which forms the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. It faces Termez port in the former Soviet republic.

The three strategic locations were earlier seized by the Taliban in a major offensive that briefly dismantled Masood's frontlines north of Kabul with the fall of several towns in nearby Parwan and Kapisa provinces.

However, the opposition launched a surprise counter-attack earlier this week, driving the Taliban back to Kabul with heavy losses.—AFP

DAWN

09 AUG 1999

NATION 18 AUG 1999

Opposition claims surprise attacks on Taliban forces

KABUL (AFP) - The Afghan opposition said Tuesday it had launched a series of surprise attacks on Taliban forces in a bid to pile pressure on the Islamic militia and draw its troops away from the capital Kabul.

Opposition spokesman Abdullah said 80 Taliban soldiers were killed in an attack in the eastern provinces of Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar near the Pakistan border and the Khyber Pass.

A further 12 Taliban died during a strike on militia positions in central Ghor province where the opposition temporarily held the provincial capital of Chaghchcharan, he said.

'One of the aims of these operations is to draw Taliban soldiers away from Kabul front lines and to put more pressure on the militia,' Abdullah said.

The Taliban has pushed the Kabul front lines back to 50 kilometres north of the capital since it launched its summer offensive against forces loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood on July 28.

Independent confirmation of the opposition claims was not immediately available. However, Taliban authorities said opposition strikes in the east had been repulsed.

'A plot by the enemy was neutralised in Kunar and Nangarhar and the perpe-

trators were punished,' the militia's official broadcaster Radio Shariat said. No further details were provided.

Abdullah said fighting was heavy Tuesday morning near Asadabad in central Kunar.

'These operations prove the Taliban lie, their claims that they have brought security to Afghanistan. People rise against them whenever they can seize the opportunity,' he said.

A Taliban official, quoted by the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) in Pakistan, said the Islamic militia had beaten back opposition attacks in Kunar and Laghman and brought in reinforcements to face any further threat.

The town of Asmar in Kunar was firmly in Taliban control, Maulvi Sadar Aazm, deputy chief of the militia administration in the eastern region, told AIP.

He admitted the district of Daulatabad in Laghman was in the control of the opposition, the Pakistan-based private agency said.

'Our opponents will fail to achieve their designs in the eastern provinces,' the Taliban official vowed.

The Kabul front lines were quiet Tuesday.

Another report from Geneva says: One thousand Tajik men are being held

by the Taliban in Kabul after fleeing fighting to the north of the Afghan capital, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said Tuesday.

The men were part of a new wave of around 20,000 people displaced by fighting between the Taliban and opposition forces. They have been arriving in Kabul since the weekend, UNHCR spokeswoman Judith Kumin said here.

She said the new wave of displaced were mainly families arriving on foot from the Panjsher Valley.

Those arrested were ethnic Tajik, Kumin said.

Opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood, meanwhile, commands a multi-ethnic force which includes Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and Turkmen.

The opposition controls the northeastern provinces from the heavily-fortified Panjsher Valley, which lies just beyond the Kabul front lines.

The Taliban launched a summer offensive against opposition forces on July 28.

The UNHCR said almost 60,000 people displaced by the fighting were now sheltering in Kabul and a further 100,000 had fled towards the north of the country, to an area bordering Tajikistan.

Taliban retake Bagram

ISLAMABAD (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia Friday captured the opposition-held Bagram air base north of Kabul, the Afghan Islamic Press reported.

Forces of opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood 'retreated' from the base 50 kilometers, north of the Afghan capital after Taliban troops entered without a fight, the report said without elaborating.

No independent confirmation on whether the Taliban were in Bagram was immediately available but sources said forces loyal to Masood had withdrawn from the base.

'Bagram is empty. Masood has withdrawn but we're not too sure if the Taliban have entered. The Taliban control the southern area of the base,' an independent source said, adding that front lines were quiet Friday. However, an opposition spokesman said its troops

were still in control of the area.

'As of Friday morning, the airbase was still held by the opposition,' said spokesman Abdullah (eds: one name).

The Taliban control most of Afghanistan. They launched an offensive over two weeks ago to wrest control of northeastern provinces from Masood, the last rival capable of thwarting total militia domination.

20,000 Afghan women, children in danger

Around 20,000 women and children are facing death in Afghanistan unless they receive urgent supplies, aid agency Medecins du Monde (MDM - Doctors of the World) warned here Friday.

The women and children have sought shelter in the northern Panjsher valley after fleeing fighting between the ruling Taliban militia and opposition forces, said MDM staff who have just returned from the region.

NATION 14 AUG 1999

NATION 20 AUG 1999

Thousands flee to Kabul as Taliban attack on Takhar fighting rages in north

repulsed: Opposition

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR — The flow of civilians towards Kabul is in progress due to continue fighting in north of Kabul between the northern alliance and Taliban.

Between August 13 to 16, some 20,000 people entered in Kabul, states the UNO weekly update, issued here in Peshawar on Wednesday. Many families reported that their homes and crops were deliberately set on fire after they were forced to leave, it added.

Due to bad situation in the valley and continued fighting, it is quite difficult to estimate how many civilians moving towards Kabul. The United Nations currently estimates that 30,000 to 40,000 displaced have fled to Kabul since the beginning of August.

August 13 and 14, over 1,870 families, have entered the Afghan capital. The UNO Regional Coordinator in Kabul Jolyon Lellie declared it "chilling sight" while commenting on the miseries of these war displaced people.

The UNO weekly update maintains that the majority of the recent influx of Internally Displaced People (IDP's) are seeking refuge with relatives in the city, but numbers continue to grow at the ex-diplomatic compound, which was temporarily made

available by the authorities. The WFP began a daily distribution of 150 grams of corn-soy blend, 20 grams of edible oil and 20 grams of sugar per person to 850 displaced families in the compound on August 8. The operation was originally slated to cover a five-day period but has been extended for 15 days. These families are also receiving food distributed by Taliban authorities. Care International continuously working to improve the sanitary facilities.

The war affected people from the affected areas are also struggling to reach in Faizabad, headquarter of Badakhshan province in northern Afghanistan. The NGO's involved in the relief activities in war affected zones, reports that up to 60,000 people may be displaced in Panjshir valley. Of these, 15,000 are estimated to be without shelter.

In Kunduz, UNHCR reported the displacement of an unverified number of persons from 22 villages in Dasht-e Archi, Imam Saheb and Sher Khan Bandar to Kunduz city due to recent fighting. The IDP's are accommodated in damaged public warehouses, and some are living under the open sky. The IDP's have been provided with drinking water and medical assistance. It further states that some IDP's from Shamali valley have arrived in Taloqan and also from Shamali in Pull-i-Khumri at Baghlan province.

KABUL (AFP) The Afghan opposition Saturday claimed to have repulsed a heavy Taliban attack on northeastern Takhar province, a key supply route for the Panjsher valley bastion of opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood. Abdullah, spokesman for Masood, said the attack on Takhar had been launched from three directions on Friday from the neighbouring Taliban-controlled Kunduz province.

The attack, backed by helicopter gunships and tanks, started around dawn and continued till late into the night, the spokesman said.

Initially the Taliban made some advance, but they were hit back and lost the areas they had taken including some of their own positions, Abdullah said.

No independent confirmation of the claim was available.

Abdullah said Taliban tanks charged along the main road between Kunduz and Takhar, which is Masood's only supply route from neighbouring Tajikistan to his native base of the Panjsher valley, 100 kilometers north of Kabul. Abdullah said 42 of the attacking militia soldiers were killed and the

same number wounded, putting opposition losses at seven killed and 15 wounded. Fighting had subsided but the opposition expected another attack by the militia using reinforcements they have brought from Kandahar, the Taliban's base in southern Afghanistan, and other areas as well as from religious schools in Pakistan, he said.

The Taliban, who have most of Afghanistan under their writ, launched on July 28 a long-prepared summer offensive to neutralise Masood, who is the last obstacle to the militia's control of the entire country.

Abdullah also said Masood's forces had gained some ground on the frontline near Kabul.

He said a convoy of Taliban patrol jeeps was ambushed by Masood's supporters around Qara Bagh 45 kilometers north of the Afghan capital.

Their five jeeps were destroyed and 35 fighters killed and some captured. Our infantry took Qara Bagh district and advanced into parts of adjacent Kalakan region, he said.

22 AUG 1999

NATION

Masood forces claim capturing areas

PESHAWAR, Aug 27: Anti-Taliban forces captured vast areas in the Samangan and Balkh provinces of northern Afghanistan, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) agency reported on Friday.

A force led by commander Ata Mohammad attacked in the Dara Soof and Godara areas of Samangan province late Thursday and captured a 40-kilometre-wide stretch, an opposition spokesman told the private news agency by telephone from the Panjsher Valley.

Several Taliban militiamen were killed and 13 were taken prisoner in the fighting, according to the spokesman.

Situated about 90 kilometres north of the Taliban-controlled Afghan capital Kabul, the valley is the stronghold of Ahmad Shah Masood, commander of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance.

AIP quoted the spokesman as saying that Masood's forces were also battling with the Taliban in Dara Gosfandi in Balkh province and had captured "a vast area".

DISPLACED: In Geneva it was announced that around 160,000 people in northeastern Afghanistan have been displaced because of the recent outbreak of fighting there between the Taliban and opposition fighters, the UN refugee agency said on Friday.

"This displacement is continuing in a fairly stable way," the spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Kris Janowski, said.

He added that the refugees — called internally displaced persons (IDPs) by the agency — were escaping areas controlled by groups "which they do not feel comfortable with."

However, Janowski said that "it is generally believed that there are unlikely to be large outflows, either to Pakistan or Tajikistan, unless the military situation in the Panjsher (Valley) were to change drastically."

The spokesman said a UN inter-agency mission which had arrived last week in the Panjsher Valley, just north of Kabul, estimated that around 100,000 refugees were there.

Another 30,000-40,000 were in the Afghan capital Kabul, Janowski said, adding that their numbers were increasing by "an estimated rate of around 150 persons per day."

AGRICULTURE LAND: The United Nations expressed concern on Friday about reports of "systematic destruction" of agricultural infrastructure by Afghanistan's radical Taliban troops in the areas they captured recently from the northern opposition alliance.—DPA/Reuters

DAWN 28 AUG 1999

Taliban retake key district in Laghman

ISLAMABAD, Aug 22: The Taliban on Sunday claimed it had driven out opposition troops from a key district in eastern Laghman province after several days of fighting.

"The district of Daulat Shah was retaken by Taliban this morning after three hours of fighting," the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoted a senior Taliban official as saying.

Maulvi Sadar Aziz, the militia's deputy chief in the eastern zone, told the Pakistan-based agency that the attack on the district was launched after wiping out opposition in three nearby pockets.

The rival troops had now been virtually driven out of the whole province, the Taliban official said. He said the Taliban had already

"crushed opposition intruders" in two other eastern provinces, Kunar and Nangarhar.

Forces loyal to anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Masood earlier this month claimed to have taken several districts in the eastern region bordering Afghanistan in a series of surprise attacks.

The opposition said the attacks were aimed at drawing Taliban troops away from the Kabul frontlines. After initial setbacks, Masood's forces contained the Taliban push towards his traditional bastion of northeastern Panjsher valley, 100kms from Kabul.

The frontlines, now located 50kms from Kabul, have been relatively quiet for the past several days.—AFP

DAWN 21 AUG 1999

Afghan see-saw

THE latest developments in Afghanistan have shattered all hopes of peace in this war-torn country. Much to the despair of the world community, earlier this week the Taliban launched their summer offensive against Ahmad Shah Masoud's forces in Panjsher. They returned to the path of hostility soon after they had held talks with the Northern Alliance at Tashkent where the six-plus-two conference was held last week. Needless to say, the peace talks have collapsed. The UN representative's desperate efforts to keep the peace process going have not succeeded. Peace prospects in Afghanistan could not have been bleaker. In the initial attacks, 130 people have been killed. It is plain that as long as hostilities persist, no reconstruction or rehabilitation work can be undertaken in this war-ravaged country.

Pinpointing who started the new round of fighting is difficult. Both sides were preparing for war. But the Taliban will have to take the major part of the blame for sporadic violence and strife in the country. They have been consistently rigid in their stance and have reneged on their commitments on several occasions. For instance at the Ashkhabad talks in March, the Taliban had agreed to enter into a power-sharing arrangement with their opponents. But soon thereafter they forgot all about it. The pattern is familiar. With the onset of winter they evince some interest in some sort of settlement with their rivals but turn their back on it with the approach of summer. It is strange that the Taliban do not see the wisdom of a political settlement but want to achieve their aims on the battlefield.

There are two aspects to this strategy which call for attention. First, a military victory of the Taliban can at best a temporary one as happened before. Earlier, they had captured many of those areas where battles are being fought now, but had to retreat in the face of

local uprisings. Secondly, it is plain that if the Taliban's opponents are driven out of their strongholds they will seek sanctuary in neighbouring countries and keep up their counter-offensive from there. Hence a military victory will not bring any lasting gain or produce a political solution of this crisis in Afghanistan. It will keep the country immersed in turbulence.

It is also time the Taliban recognized the multi-ethnic composition of the Afghan society. This is a fact of life which has determined the course of history in the region. In today's context when governments do not put too much reliance on military force as on political consensus for their writ to run, the Taliban should work for the establishment of a broad-based government which should have representatives drawn from all major sections of the population. This is possible only if meaningful talks are held between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance.

To facilitate these talks to be productive, it is important that the neighbouring countries, which have been aiding the combatants in Afghanistan by supplying them arms and money, cease their intervention by proxy. They should prevail on their protegee to be conciliatory in their stance in the negotiations. Once the warring sides know that the flow of arms and money will stop, they will have to opt for reconciliation and compromise. Pakistan has a major stake in peace across its northwestern border. The instability in Afghanistan has a way of overflowing into Pakistan and affecting its politics, economics and society. The Afghan events also cast their shadow on Pakistan's foreign relations, especially its ties with Central Asia, Iran and also the major powers. To neutralize the unwholesome effect of Afghan events on Pakistan's affairs, it is essential that the conflict in that country is brought to an end.

Panjsher's invulnerability threatened

News Analysis By Nafees Taktar

ISLAMABAD - Conquering Panjsher valley, home town of Taliban's main opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masood is no doubt, a difficult task. The geographical composition of the valley and its people's odium for the non-Tajiks obstructed adventurers to enter the small valley since civil war broke out in Afghanistan on the eve of former Soviet Union occupation. The last various Jehadi groups and the rulers of Afghanistan - Taliban, come down with heavy casualties whenever

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Panjsher's invulnerability threatened

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they tried to extend their rule to the valley. Taliban's "Try, try again" formula, however, this time poses a threat to all the stories of Panjsher's might and invulnerability. A common Panjshiri is tired of a long military resistance he showed to the enemies throughout the civil war. A prolonged indulgence in the civil war has made him short of all sort of resources. His wish that his leader Ahmad Shah Masood will once become the ruler of Afghanistan seems now unattainable to him in the present scenario. The allies of Masood are no more existing in the active field. And here frustration starts.

Contrary to Panjsheris, Taliban has more than one edge, in their latest summer offensive over their main opposition group—Shura-e-Nazar, led by Masood. Taliban's frequent adventures towards Panjsher valley since the fall of Kabul in September 1996 had made them familiar with the geography of the area. The geographical synthesis of Panjsher provides a natural defence to the valley. The well-equipped Russians, Masood's other enemies and Taliban—all failed to make a breakthrough in the north of Kabul where lies the Panjsher valley and its surroundings. All the invaders later covered their retreats by saying that narrow passes and high mountains did not give them way to go ahead.

For Taliban the situation is now different. They overcome the geographical advantage of the opposition by staying there for about three years while engaging their opponents all the time. The tempo of engagement, though, witnessed many ups and downs but the exercise was not futile. It helped Taliban to get familiar with the highly difficult circumstances and geographically tough region. Their presence in the north of Afghan capital built up a constant pressure on their enemies, who did not miss a single chance for recapturing Kabul since its fall to Taliban three years ago. Now for Taliban, it seems that geographical obstacles will be of little importance, which

in itself is a dangerous development for Masood.

That Taliban are comparatively fresh, is their other plus point in the current offensive against Masood. The latest fighting in the north of Kabul is between the fresh and weary fighters. The last three years saw Masood men highly engaged in defending their areas including north of Kabul, Panjsher valley, Takhar and Badakhshan provinces. His troops remained mobile in the recent years, without having proper arrangements for reinforcements, moving from one corner to another to resist Taliban's move to extend their rule. The exercise led to an overall fatigue without scoring any major victory.

Taliban, on the other hand, give proper breathing space to their fighters. They not only wait for a proper time to strike at the opposition but they have also better arrangements for reinforcements. These factors keep their troops fresh and energetic against their opponents. Taliban's recent history of success showed that they inflicted heavy casualties on their enemies in the beginning of their assault and made quick advances. Only a fresh army can give such results.

In their latest assault in the north of Kabul, the Taliban troops don't seem weary. Their attack took place after an interval of about one-year though some skirmishes occurred between the two forces during this period. In its very first phase, Taliban seem strong as they scored victories on the ground, and moving smoothly towards their ultimate goal—the valley of Panjsher.

Then Taliban's numerical advantage gives a psychological setback to Masood's weary and comparatively small troops. The previous fightings between the two sides proved Masood men good fighters. They repulsed Taliban successfully from their areas though they were smaller in number. It was mainly due to the fact that Taliban did not properly utilise their numerical advantage. They often preferred to fight on one or two fronts.

Now with the passage of time Taliban learnt exploiting their numerical advantage. Like their earlier strategy in Mazhar-e-Sharif, they have opened more than two fronts against Masood men in their latest offensive against Panjsher valley and its surroundings. Only in the first four days of the fighting Taliban opened five fronts against their opponents. They have now engaged the opposition forces at the New Road, Old Road, Kohi-Safi; towns of Tagab and Nejrab and a fifth position called Ghorband. That means more engagement with small number of troops for Masood, which can possibly lead to Taliban's success in the latest summer offensive.

Apart from opening new fronts, Taliban will also this time use available technology against their opponents. In their previous failed attempts, many of Taliban troops were killed due to landmines. This time Taliban are extra careful to avoid mines-related casualties. The use of their ageing Migs gives the impression to the other side that Taliban are well-equipped. That impression is not a positive sign for Masood men at a time when they need more confidence and courage to at least repulse the current Taliban offensive.

And finally, Taliban's determination to do away with their only viable opponent—Ahmad Shah Masood, is a major factor behind the recent adventure in the north of Kabul. Taliban leaders in their private conversations are of the opinion that their war-torn country could only become stable once Masood is vanished from the Afghan scene.

It is perhaps this determination that Taliban opted for launching a fresh attack against the opposition soon after the peace negotiations concluded in Tashkent in the third week of July. They have so far resisted all pressures against their recent attack on opposition forces. For Taliban, the capture of Panjsher, will mean control over the whole of Afghanistan, which they think can be attained only through abolishing all other authorities in the country.

Afghan elders facing life threats

Although, majority of the former Afghan politicians who had been instrumental against late Dr. Najib Ullah regime had migrated to European and American countries yet their near and dear ones are still residing in several parts of the province where they are facing threats to their life.

In the wake of mysterious killings of known Afghans and frequent attacks against scores of others, these relatives of the known Afghans have now confined themselves to their houses. Almost all of them intend to get peace and security but they are unable to materialise their dreams due to lack of resources.

The recent war of words between the American-led civilised nation and extremist religious circles so far headed by Arab militant Osama Bin Laden has multiplied grievances of these innocent and helpless people.

They couldn't differentiate between the religious-minded people from both Pakistan and Afghanistan who are reportedly bent upon eliminating those who want a negotiated solution to the long-awaited Afghan conflict, transfer of power to a broad-based interim government and restoration of the lost identity of Afghanistan.

In April 1992, when the regime of late Dr Najib Ullah collapsed, many

of his associates along with their near and dear migrated to Pakistan to escape revenge and harassment at the hands of their erstwhile foes.

Though the Mujahideen forces, had failed to fulfil the promises of a peaceful and Islamic welfare state and their internal differences has not only resulted destruction to Afghanistan and genocide civilians but it has enhanced fear among those who are associated with the ruling Watan Party of late Dr Najib Ullah.

During such a transitional period, a large number of the PDPA, now Watan Party, stalwarts had been brutally killed, their houses were looted and plundered and even their young wives and daughters were raped and made hostages by the Jehadic and militia commanders.

As a result of such treatment at the hands of the commanders and self-made generals, a large number of the leading Afghan figures migrated to Pakistan. At that time, Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif was governing the country for the first time as a Prime Minister and he was enjoying association of nationalists like ANP of Wali Khan, PMAP of Mehmood Khan Achakzai and PNP of Hasil Bizenjo. As a result of such alliance, these Af-

ghan elders had found Pakistan a peaceful country to stay.

Prominent among them were Sulaiman Laiq second in command to late Dr Najib Ullah, Vice President Gen. Rafi, Defence Minister Aslam Watanjar, Saleh Ghorbani, Ahmad Abdul Qadoos Ghorbani, Ahmad Bashir Raegar, Hamid Ullah Rogh, Habib Mangal, Abdul Rashid Waziri, Engineer Nazar Mohammad, Haji Mohammad Chamkani, Niaz Mohammad Mohmand, Nimat Ullah Pazhwak, Hadi Mukamil, Zahoor Razamjo, Dasgiri Panjsheri, Prof. Mahmood Sooma, Dalili, Miftah Ud Din Safi and others.

However, with the passage of time, almost all of them left for various European, American and other countries. Those who were unable to fly to other countries, remained under constant threats of intimidation. As a result of such threats a number of them like Gen. Nazir Mohammad a former Defence Minister, Gen. Gul Aqa, Mohammad Hasham Khan Paktyanay and dozens of others have joined the list of those Afghans who are being mysteriously killed in Peshawar, Quetta and other parts of Pakistan since 1979. However, after the brutal murder of late Mohammad Hasham Khan Pakty-

aney in October 1998, the remaining family members of late Dr Najib Ullah left for Sweden. Hasham Khan was first cousin of late Dr Najib Ullah.

Soon after the mysterious death of Hasham Khan Paktyaney the remaining relatives of the former ministers and technocrats are faced with serious crisis. Besides daughter of Sulaiman Laiq and a large number of others are facing similar threats including Rashid Waziri. A recent report published by a monthly magazine from Karachi states that about 100,000 US dollars were distributed among the hired professional assassins by the powerful quarters of Afghanistan for carrying out targeted killings of the prominent Afghans in Peshawar.

Besides supporters of the former ruling Watan Party of Dr Najib Ullah, other Afghans who are either favouring a negotiated solution to the conflict or favouring the peace initiatives of former King Mohammad Zahir Shah also facing such threats. Since 1979 when the former Soviet Union invaded its 100,000 troops in Afghanistan, such type of moderate Afghans are the main target of these people who are either patronising the mysterious killing or harassing them for unknown purposes. Former Afghan minister and parliamentarian Abdul Ahad Khan Karzai was the latest target of killers.

Peshawar Diary

By Shauhin Shahid

09 AUG 1999

NATION

Taliban securing new conquests north of Kabul

DEH SABZ PASS, Afghanistan (AFP) - Afghanistan's Taliban militia Thursday launched a clean-up operation in several districts captured on the Shamali Plains north of here, militia soldiers and locals coming from the area said.

Villagers who left Qara Bagh, 40 kilometers north of here, said militia soldiers were conducting a house to house search looking for opposition troops before they advanced any further.

They said that frontlines have been pushed back close to a point known as the T-junction on the Old Road where the districts of Gul Dara, Dakou, Kalakan, Istalif, and Qara Bagh are under the Taliban's firm control.

The Taliban drove supporters of opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood out of these areas during an intense dawn attack on Wednesday.

Militia soldiers manning a checkpoint on Deh Sabz Pass, 35 kilometers north of Kabul, also said the Taliban would focus on securing the Shamali districts.

'A clean-up operation is under way. We want to go ahead step by step in order not to repeat the same mistakes,' a Taliban commander told journalists.

Last week the Taliban took the Shamali region and areas in the adjacent Parwan and Kapisa provinces but they were pushed back in a counter-offensive by Masood after holding their ground for just three days.

Anti-Taliban groups claimed they had killed around 800 Taliban soldiers in the surprise counter attack.

Deh Sabz Pass on the New Road leads to Bagram airbase, another 50 kilometers further north, which the Taliban described as a no-man's land.

'Nobody controls the airport,' the commander said, adding journalists who intended to drive towards Bagram needed permission from Mulla Rabbani, the Taliban's second in command.

Plumes of smoke were seen columning skywards from villages in Qara Bagh.

Taliban soldiers said houses had caught fire during the fighting.

'The bushes and the firewood, people had stocked for winter had caused the fire,' the militia commander said.

However, a local carrying his family on a donkey said the Taliban had burnt some houses. 'Yes they are burning some of the houses,' he said.

Masood has accused the Taliban of torching people's houses and levelling their gardens and farmlands.

Displaced villagers, on their way to the capital, carried a few belongings, cattle and water and said the militia told them to leave their houses.

The locals, mostly women, children

and elderly people said they left home at dawn and had walked out in 40 degree Centigrade heat.

Earlier the Afghan opposition accused the Taliban and their Pakistani supporters of adopting a scorched earth policy in the latest round of fighting on front lines north of Kabul.

An opposition spokesman said in a statement that homes had been torched, vineyards, orchards and cultivated land had been levelled to deter the local population from returning.

'The objective by the enemy as observed from Kalakan, Guldara, Dakou and Istalif is clearly the complete forced deportation of the civilian population, including women and children through wreaking havoc.'

The statement said heavy artillery barrages and air sorties 'including the use of cluster bombs on August 10 had preceded the withdrawal of the opposition from the combat zone.'

Masood controls the northeastern provinces and stands as the last obstacle capable of thwarting total Taliban control of Afghanistan, after five years of civil war. The militia already controls most of the country.

Opposition claims were carried in a press statement issued by its foreign affairs department which is headed by Masood's main spokesman Abdullah.

Taliban mop up after capturing villages

KABUL, Aug 12: Taliban fighters on Thursday launched mopping up operations against opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masood's forces after capturing several villages in an offensive just north of the Afghan capital, Kabul.

'We have decided to clean up these villages from weapons and the remnants of the opposition troops before moving forward,' a Taliban fighter in the area told reporters.

The Taliban flushed out opposition troops from several villages in the north of Kabul, including Qarabagh, Istalif, Guldara and Mir Bacha Kot.

The Taliban are now based close to a junction that links the two

main highways leading north from Kabul towards Masood's airbase at Bagram, 50 km north of the capital.

Big columns of smoke could be seen from a distance rising from most of the villages that have fallen to the Taliban in the area, witnesses said.

Masood has accused the Taliban of burning down civilian houses in reprisal for a Masood counter-offensive last week that reversed key Taliban gains. The area, called the Shomali plains, is home to thousands of Masood's Tajik ethnic group.

Taliban fighters denied the charge and said the houses caught fire during fighting on Wednesday.—Reuters

Taliban forcibly ejecting civilians from their houses

From Shamim Shahid

PESHAWAR - In a bid to capture Ahmad Shah Masud-dominated areas to north of Kabul, Taliban soldiers are forcibly ejecting civilians of their houses in Shomali valley near the frontlines and asking them to walk to Kabul.

The United Nations in its report on Sunday confirmed that a large scale displacement had occurred from the Shamali valley. Within a period of less than 36 hours on August 13 and 14, over 1,870 families (an estimated 10,000 people) entered the Afghan capital, it added and apprehended, "a major influx is anticipated within the next few days."

Earlier, the Northern Alliance had accused Taliban of making hostage thousands of Tajik families just to pressure them (Ahmad Shah Masud forces).

However, Maulvi Abdul Raqeeb, the Afghan Minister for Refugees Repatriation who recently visited Peshawar had denied such allegations and claimed that these families are free to go any-

where inside Afghanistan. But at the same time, he had confirmed return from 50,000 to 60,000 people from Jalalabad to Kabul in his press conference at Peshawar on August 10. He further claimed that Islamic Emirate was providing maximum facilities to the war displaced families.

The report maintains that the United Nations had obtained first hand accounts from the new arrivals representing all ethnic groups that verify that Taliban fighters forced men, women and children out of their houses and told them to walk to Kabul. They had also confirmed earlier reports that the Taliban are intentionally setting homes on fire. The international agencies in Kabul are monitoring the arrival of growing numbers of displaced from the Shamali valley, drawing up lists of the displaced, and providing new arrivals with water and high protein biscuits.

Some of the displaced had made 40-kilometer journey on foot, while others have been conveyed in trucks commandeered by the Taliban authorities. Many of the new arrivals are not only

exhausted by their journey but are also some of them have also become destitutes. A long queue of elderly men, women and children, some walking with their livestock loaded with a few possessions, continued to approach the city into the late afternoon on Saturday.

The report further states that the forced displacement and intentional destruction of civilians homes is clear violation of international humanitarian law. It is also against the stated policy of Taliban, whose leader Mullah Omar earlier condemned such acts and called on Taliban troops to respect the life and property of civilians.

Earlier, this month, 2300 individuals forcibly displaced from Shamali were temporarily accommodated in the an ex-diplomatic compound in Kabul.

The United Nations is greatly alarmed that the latest upsurge in fighting in the Shamali valley is, once again, causing loss of life and intentional destruction of civilians property. The United Nations calls upon the Taliban to immediately halt the campaign against the civilian population.

NATION 16 AUG 1999

Five Taliban mutilated for theft

KABUL, Aug 13: Five members of Taliban movement had their right hands and left feet publicly amputated on Friday.

Thousands of men and dozens of women gathered at Kabul's sports

stadium to watch the punishment after a military tribunal found all five guilty of robbing a Kabul resident of the equivalent of \$700.

The accused, in their mid-20s,

were brought to the stadium in an ambulance in shackles. Masked doctors performed the amputations and the severed limbs were put on display as a warning.

—Reuters

14 AUG 1999

DAWN

Taliban detain thousands of refugees

KABUL, Aug 16: The Taliban have arrested thousands of refugees who fled here after recent fighting, independent sources alleged on Monday, but the militia insisted they were only weeding out a handful of criminals.

The sources said the Taliban began a security crackdown on Sunday morning with the arrests of 2,000 people at Khair Khana, on the northern outskirts of Kabul, where the United Nations says more than 10,000 refugees had entered the city in just two days.

Several sources said the arrests had forced people into hiding amid fears they would be denounced as anti-Islamic and jailed.

"It's a mess. Foreign groups can't

carry out their work if people are too scared to queue up for bread or food because they might be thrown in jail," one western source said.

But Kabul police chief Mulla Abdurrazzaq said the capital was quiet and calm, saying only around 60 people had been arrested around Khair Khana for thieving along with others he described as "anti-Taliban elements".

"We arrested thieves, opposition supporters and those who have disguised themselves as Taliban soldiers and were trying to create instability inside the city," he said.

Abdurrazzaq said those who had a case to answer would be brought before a Taliban court and tried under Shariat.

Meanwhile, the anti-Taliban forces on Monday claimed a series of gains after fighting erupted in the country's central, eastern and northern provinces.

General Sayed Husain Anwari said three consecutive Taliban offensives in the northern province of Takhar were repulsed by troops aligned to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood.

Anwari said further fighting had erupted in central Ghor province where Masood's troops were within 10 kilometres of the provincial capital, Chekchcheran.

A further operation was launched in the eastern provinces of Laghman and Kunar early Monday morning, he said.

"In Laghman, the districts of Daulatshah and Ali Shing were captured soon after and our troops continued their advance towards other Taliban-controlled districts in the province.

"In Kunar anti-Taliban troops have overrun the districts of Khiva, Saukai and Darre Noor. These three regions are now firmly under our control," Anwari said.

Earlier the private Afghan Islamic Press in Pakistan also reported fighting in the eastern provinces, including Nangarhar.

The arrests at checkpoints around Kabul were focused on refugees who had been forced out of their homes by the militia's summer offensive across the Shamali

Plains against the northern opposition alliance.

A Taliban deserter from the Shamali region said "outside forces" had moved in and were treating everybody with suspicion.

"It's not ethnic or secular-based. They are rounding up everybody and forcing them out.

Their villages are burned and then the people find themselves arrested in Kabul. This is not acceptable," he said.

"A number of gunmen who had hidden in the residential areas turned the people's houses into trenches to fight ... they had stored arms and ammunition in every house," the official Taliban newspaper Anis said in an editorial. —AFP

Taliban force 10,000 to leave homes

By Masood Haider

NEW YORK, Aug 17: The United Nations on Monday said that an estimated 10,000 people in Afghanistan had been forced to leave their homes in the Shamali Valley near the front lines north of Kabul.

According to the office of the United Nations Coordinator for Afghanistan "there are confirmed reports that Taliban fighters forced men, women and children out of their houses and told them to walk to Kabul. There are also confirmed reports that the Taliban are intentionally setting houses on fire."

"Families speak of whole villages being burnt to the ground and crops set on fire to deter them from moving back to this once-fertile valley," the UN Coordinator's Office says.

Taliban authorities continue to deny any "scorched earth" policy in the area, the UN said.

International agencies are providing food and water to the new arrivals, many of them dehydrated and completely destitute following their 40-kilometre journey. The UN is expecting another major influx of displaced people into the Afghan capital over the next few days.

AIR FORCE CHIEF: The chief of the Taliban's air force in Afghanistan on Tuesday denied allegations by the beleaguered opposition that Pakistan was assisting the militia's air power, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) agency said, adds dpa.

Mulla Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor also said the Taliban had a sufficient number of Russian

MIg-21 and Su-22 jets and "do not need anybody else's planes", AIP reported.

Besides, Pakistanis are not experts on Russian-made aircraft, the Pakistan-based private news service quoted Mansoor, Taliban air force chief, as saying.

Mansoor also denied that Taliban jets were bombing civilian populations. "We are hitting only military targets," he said.

Several opposition spokesmen have accused Pakistan of hitting their positions.

Earlier, AIP reported that the Taliban militia has rushed reinforcements to the Kunar and Laghman fronts as opposition forces continued their offensive in the northeastern provinces.

AIP quoted an opposition spokesman as saying Commander Ahmad Shah Masood's forces would intensify their attacks in a bid to capture the capital cities of Laghman, Kunar and Nangarhar provinces.

The spokesman claimed that the opposition evicted the militia from Pashud district of Kunar in overnight fighting.

Maulvi Sadar Azam, the Taliban administrator of the eastern zone, admitted to AIP that the opposition had captured Daulatshah district in Laghman but denied all other territorial gains claimed by the opposition.

Azam said the Taliban repulsed all other attacks in the provinces and "inflicted such a defeat at Khewa that the enemy would not dare to attack again".

DAWN

18 AUG 1999

DAWN

17 AUG 1999

Refugees plight in Panjsher valley 'serious'

ISLAMABAD, Aug 19: Around 100,000 Afghans who fled fighting near Kabul face a "serious" situation in the northeastern opposition stronghold of the Panjsher valley, humanitarian groups said Thursday.

Aid organizations SDC from Switzerland, FOCUS and France's ACTED said after an on-the-spot assessment that the situation was "serious enough to compel immediate action" to help the displaced.

The plight of refugees in Panjsher was likely to "deteriorate" if food was not provided immediately.

ACTED and FOCUS, which is run by the Prince Aga Khan Foundation, have begun a joint emergency relief operation and called for international assistance for the effort.

The situation of the refugees in the southern part of Panjsher, where they are dangerously overcrowding riverbanks, was "especially alarming," an ACTED report said.

"These displaced people are receiving very little assistance from the local authorities and people are in great need of immediate food and shelter supply," it said.

ACTED set up a base in Panjsher last Friday from where it has been organising a daily distribution of bread for the most vulnerable peo-

ple, particularly in the south of the valley.

OPPOSITION ATTACK: Afghanistan's Taliban repulsed a major opposition offensive north of the capital Kabul on Thursday morning, a news service reported.

The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said forces of commander Ahmed Shah Masood attacked the Taliban 50 km north of Kabul in Istalif district on Wednesday but the attack was repulsed after intense overnight battles.

It said the warring sides were also locked in heavy fighting in Laghman province in eastern Afghanistan near the border with Pakistan where the Taliban launched an attack on Masood's fighters on Thursday morning.

It said two opposition fighters were killed by landmines and two more were wounded and were in Taliban captivity.

Quoting informed sources, AIP said artillery exchanges which started overnight were continuing between the two sides.

One Taliban fighter was killed and two more were wounded in the battle, the Pakistan-based private news service said.

Quoting the latest reports, AIP said intense fighting was raging between the two factions.—AFP/Reuters/dpa

UN mediation stressed for peace in Afghanistan

From Our Correspondent
PESHAWAR — Maj. Usman Ziaamal, Secretary General, Afghan Social Democratic Party has been asked to deploy the United Nations peace keeping forces in Afghanistan and for convening an emergency meeting of the traditional Afghan Loya Jirga which according to him could ensure return of peace in Afghanistan.

In a press statement issued here on Tuesday, the Afghan nationalist leader has dispelled the impression that the ongoing confrontation is among various groups, but he declared it an imposed war by foreign forces against Afghans. Elaborating his point of view, Usman Ziaamal said that for meeting their nefarious designs, the imperialist forces have fuelled the confrontation and internal clashes among the Afghans on the name of religion. These foreign forces have made not only heavy investment but even inflicted severe human losses to Afghans.

The ASDP leader said that, in fact, these foreign forces are unaware of the cultural values in the Afghan society. All the Afghans whether they are Pukhtoons, Hazara's, Tadjiks, Uzbeks

or others, all of them are united. Such foreign forces should take a lesson from the former Soviet Union which could not defeat the Afghans. He said that it is a fact that Afghans would not become a party to the conspiracies hatched against solidarity and sovereignty of their motherland. In this connection, he urged all of the foreign forces and groups to stop meddling in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

He added that it is crystal clear that no one could govern Afghanistan through force for a long time, therefore, all the warring factions need to refrain themselves of further fighting. He said only the United Nations and Security Council are capable of resolving this conflict. In this connection, he said UNO needs to deploy its peace-keeping forces in Afghanistan and help the peace loving Afghans in convening an emergency meeting of the traditional Loya Jirga. He added that after building up consensus over formation of a broad based interim government, the Loya Jirga with collaboration of the UNO peace-keeping forces would go for organising a national army.

FRONTIER POST

18 AUG 1999

DAWN 20 AUG 1999

25 AUG 1999

FRONTIER POST

Several dead as Kandahar attacked

Missile slammed into Mulla Omer's residence

By AIMAL KHAN

PESHAWAR - Scores of people were feared dead as the Taliban headquarters in Kandahar came under what is presumed a heavy US missile attack late Tuesday night, reports from across the Durand Line said.

Afghan sources, confirming the strikes, claimed that one of the surface-to-surface missiles slammed into the residence of Taliban's supreme leader Mulla Omer.

They, however, pointed out that the Taliban supremo had been seen in the city after the attack, putting to rest speculation that Mulla Omer had been killed.

"A boundary wall of Mulla Omer's residence was razed by the powerful hit preceded by a huge explosion which prompted the terrified residents to flee the city in droves," reports said, speaking of many casualties and severe damage to buildings.

The blast that rocked Kandahar at around 10.45 pm led the panicky

inhabitants to believe that the United States had launched the much-feared air strikes against

US denies hand in blast

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The White House denied reports Tuesday it was involved in a huge explosion in Kandahar, the headquarters of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban.

"There is no truth at all to any report of US government involvement," an administration official said on condition of anonymity, when asked about an Afghan Islamic Press report.

The story said the cause of the blast was still unknown, but the southern city's inhabitants believed they were under air attack from the United States and fled in panic.

Osama bin Laden's bases.

A diplomat here claimed that it was an isolated attack apparently

targeting the residence of Mullah Omar. He also hinted at heavy losses in the assault, which plunged the Taliban headquarters into complete darkness.

The Kandahar administration, meanwhile, said that the exact number of casualties was hard to assess, given the chaotic situation blanketing the city. They feared that hundreds of people were seriously wounded.

According to AIP, the cause of the blast was not known but the southern city's inhabitants believed they were under air attack from the United States and fled in panic.

"Mullah Omar was seen safe and sound after the explosion," AIP said. Its report gave no further details and could not be immediately confirmed by independent sources.

AFP adds: On August 20 last year the US launched cruise missiles on suspected terrorist training camps belonging to alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan.

Afghani scholar offers reward for Clinton's head

ISLAMABAD (AFP) - An Afghani religious scholar Sunday offered to pay a reward of five million offered to pay Clinton to anyone who killed US President Bill Clinton, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said.

The scholar, Maulana Abdur Rahim Muslimdost, told AIP his offer was in retaliation for the five-million-dollar reward posted by the United States for the arrest of Osama bin Laden.

"I will pay five million-dollar more," the agency quoted Muslimdost as saying.

The scholar, who lives in Peshawar, said the US "is the biggest terrorist in the world and an enemy who wants to destroy Muslims".

He warned any US attack against Afghanistan for sheltering Osama bin Laden would entail "dangerous consequences".

Several local dailies also said a Pakistani religious leader, Mufti Nizamuddin Sahnizai, issued a Fatwa Saturday, calling on Muslims to wage war against America.

Sahnizai, President of Majlis Taawan a seminar, accusing the US of hatching conspiracies against the Islamic world, the reports said.

Afghanistan's ruling Taliban Saturday condemned last year's missile raid and accused Washington itself of terrorism.

NATION

23 AUG 1999

Two Taliban Governors killed in car explosion

Pakistan for end to interference in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (AFP) - Two Taliban provincial governors have been killed in an explosion at the town of Baghlan in northern Afghanistan, the Afghan opposition claimed Friday.

The Governor of Balkh, Mullah Akhtar Qandahari, and the Governor of Kunduz, Arif Khan, died when a vehicle in which they were travelling exploded in 'mysterious circumstances' late Thursday, an opposition spokesman said in a statement.

The spokesman, General Sayed Husain Anwari, also claimed that the police chief of Kunduz, Mirzah Nasser, was 'critically' injured.

His comments were sent here from the Panjsher stronghold of main opposition commander Ahmad Shah Massoud.

The report could not be independently confirmed and no immediate comment was available from the Taliban.

On Tuesday a massive truck bomb exploded close to the home of Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar in the Kandahar headquarters city of the Islamic militia, leaving 10 people dead and widespread devastation.

The Taliban said the bombing was an attempt to kill the Taliban leader, who survived the attack.

App adds: Pakistan Friday asked "some countries in the neighbourhood and beyond" to desist from lending support to certain factions in Afghanistan,

saying that would only prolong the agony of Afghan people.

Pakistan's Permanent Ambassador to United Nations, Inamul Haque told a formal meeting of the Security Council that Pakistan does not lend any support to any side in Afghanistan.

"We know, however, that some countries in the neighbourhood and beyond are doing so by various means and for reasons which are apparent and well known to the international community," he said.

Inam said Pakistan's advice to them also is to "desist from such efforts since they would only prolong the agony of the Afghan people, without succeeding in advancing their own perceived interests."

The international community, he urged, must engage both Afghan sides and continue to encourage them to embrace peace through the establishment of a broad based multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan.

Pakistan, Inam said, has fully supported the efforts of the United Nations, the Secretary General and his Special Representative, as well as the initiatives of the OIC.

NATION

28 AUG 1999

Kandahar blast claims 10 lives

KABUL, Aug 25: A huge truck bomb near the home of Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar killed at least 10 people and caused widespread devastation in the city of Kandahar, Taliban officials said on Wednesday.

Mullah Omar narrowly escaped the bomb late Tuesday, sources said. But scores of people were injured and buildings up to one kilometre away were damaged.

The bomb left a crater the size of a tennis court, according to the Pakistan based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP).

"It was a deliberate act of sabotage by the enemies of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," Taliban spokesman Abdul Hai Mutmaen said. He declined to say who the militia thought was responsible.

Mutmaen said the truck, carrying explosives crammed into a barrel, was parked near Omar's house on the Herat Highway in the southern city.

Omar's home is a short distance from a residence once used to house Osama bin Laden.

The anti-Taliban alliance said Wednesday it was not responsible for the blast.

Opposition general Sayed Anwari said it was the result of frustrated locals venting their anger at the militia.

"We cannot take responsibility for this act. We have not done it. This is the reaction of the people of Kandahar," he said.

"There will be more of such incidents against Pakistan," Anwari claimed.

"The Kandahar blast is the reaction of the people of Kandahar against the Pakistani invasion. This shows the hatred of our freedom loving people against Mulla Omar who brought the Pakistanis to Afghanistan," Anwari said.

"This spirit is strengthening," he added.

Independent sources said the offices of the Red Cross and French aid group Medicines Sans Frontieres — located about a kilometre from Omar's house — were severely damaged in the attack.

"The Red Cross has no window left," one source said. — JFP

THE NEWS INTERNATIONAL

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FRONTIER POST

11 AUG 1999

Support for Osama undiminished: Taliban

KABUL, Aug 10: On the eve of the first anniversary of US missile attacks against Afghanistan, the ruling Taliban on Tuesday reiterated support for Osama bin Laden and launched an appeal to Muslim's to back them against any further US military action.

Through the official media here and a barrage of statements abroad, militia authorities are warning Washington is about to carry out another military strike against the Taliban for harbouring bin Laden.

However, there were no signs that Taliban supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar would relent and hand over the Saudi dissident.

Instead he complained the US is pressuring the militia because of their beliefs, based on Sharia law.

"American pressure is only directed at us. If there is any pressure from the United Nations or any other party that is also emanating from the American pressure," Omar said.

"Therefore we call upon the world Muslims to back, support and help us," he told the official Radio Shariat.

Bin Laden has lived as a "welcomed guest" in Afghanistan since 1996 when the militia's campaign to liberate Afghanistan was gaining momentum. Since then they have won control of most of the country.

Taliban Minister of Information Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi said bin Laden's status has not changed, adding, "this is the position of the people of Afghanistan".

Washington launched a Cruise missile attack last August 20 against alleged installations run by bin Laden in retaliation for the bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania two weeks earlier.

The August 7 embassy bombings last year left 224 people dead while official reports here claimed 25

Afghans were killed in the Cruise missile attack.

Muttaqi's comments came after reports on Jazira satellite television that dozens of commandos had landed in Islamabad, for an operation against bin Laden.

It said one US fighter plane had also landed in Islamabad, and another at an airport close to the Pakistani border with Afghanistan, ready to carry out air strikes.

The Jazira report was confirmed to AFP by a Taliban official in Abu Dhabi but denied by officials in Washington.

"US planes landed in Islamabad, and they could be on a mission against Afghanistan," said Aziz Rahman, third secretary at the Taliban mission.

However, while bin Laden has enjoyed the support of the Taliban, opposition Afghan groups warned he should be tried as a murderer.

"If we capture him, we will treat him as the killer of thousands of our fellow countrymen," opposition alliance spokesman Abdullah said.

The opposition under commander Ahmad Shah Masood control the country's northeast provinces and have accused bin Laden of leading Arab fighters in the 055 Brigade of fighting with the Taliban soldiers.

Abdullah said the Taliban could have saved Afghanistan from the previous US attack by expelling bin Laden. The opposition spokesman said Omar's appeal would gain nothing but the backing of more terrorist organizations.

The Taliban are only recognised as head of state in Afghanistan by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

"We rely on God the Almighty whether or not someone helps us," Omar said in his address to Muslims.—AFP

Taliban condemn US missile strikes

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban Saturday condemned US missile strikes targeting alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden one year and one day ago, accusing Washington itself of terrorism.

The first anniversary of the missile strikes on bases in the province of Khost passed without incident and without comment from the militia's official press.

However, one day after the anniversary, militia authorities warned of the dangers of interfering in Afghani affairs.

"We believe that every issue can be solved peacefully and not through the use of force," a Taliban foreign ministry statement said.

Saudi bin Laden is wanted for the twin bombings of two US embassies in east Africa on August 7 last year.

Children on front lines

Taliban have rejected claims by the United Nations that children had joined their ranks and were fighting on the country's front lines.

"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) has never recruited young men to its ranks and will never do so," Taliban Information Minister, Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi said.

He accused the UN of "making untrue statements in order to defame and pressure the IEA" in order "to heighten the propaganda campaign against the Islamic Emirate".

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan earlier this month expressed "deep concern" over reports of the involvement in the conflict of students, some as young as 14. He called on the warring parties to respect the convention on the rights of the child.

On Friday UNICEF officials in Pakistan reiterated the concern.

The UN has recently confirmed the Taliban has conducted a scorched earth policy along the Shamali Plains, forcing more than 100,000 people to flee villages during recent fighting.

And the UN's special envoy to Afghanistan has warned against the militia using Pakistani and Arab mercenaries, a charge Taliban authorities have denied.

The Taliban control most of Afghanistan after a five-year civil war against forces loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood.

Three weeks ago the militia launched a summer offensive aimed at wresting control of the north eastern provinces.

FRONTIER POST

22 AUG 1999

NATION 09 AUG 1999

Taliban did not ask for aid from Pak *madrassas*

By Sadaqat Jan

ISLAMABAD - Despite facing reverses and setbacks on the battle front, Afghanistan's ruling Taliban have not asked religious schools in neighbouring Pakistan to send in students to reinforce their ranks, administrator of a *madrassa* (Islamic seminary) said on Sunday.

"Except for a few Afghans who might have gone out of their own choice to join Taliban rest of the students are busy in their studies," Maulana Anwarul Haq, administrator Darul Ulum Haqqania, said by phone from Akora Khat-tak.

He said Taliban have so far not made any request for fresh reinforcements.

Madrassa students in Pakistan, mainly in the Frontier and Balochistan provinces, and predominantly from Afghanistan, are used to taking their turns alternately at studies and war eversince the Taliban movement started.

They leave their schools to join Taliban as fighters when needed or to rest those on the frontline for too long.

Darul Ulum Haqqania, which has thrown up almost all of Taliban's top

leadership, was closed last August when the student militia stormed into Mazar-e-Sharif, capital of Afghanistan's northern Balkh province.

An Afghan delegation arrived in Haqqania last year with a letter from Taliban supreme commander Mullah Mohammad Umar asking the *madrassa's* Afghan students to join Taliban ranks to help them firm their hold on the newly-captured areas.

Following the delegation's arrival, a meeting was held at Haqqania of ulema (Islamic religious scholars) who were running *madrassas* in different parts of the Frontier province and it was decided that not to harm studies of Afghan students.

Haqqania and *madrassas* in the Frontier with mainly Afghans on the roll remained closed for over a month last year. The students were given a break from their studies to go home, to fight war. The seminaries were further deserted as hundreds of Pakistani Taliban also went over the border along with their classmates to help in the jihad.

"They (the students) went in such overwhelming numbers that it was difficult for the Taliban in Kabul to arrange proper lodging and food for them,"

Anwarul Haq said.

Inspite of mounting a massive summer offensive against the opposition there has been no demand from Taliban for holidays to Haqqania's Afghan students this time around, he said.

Haqqania continues to hold a special place on the Afghan political scene eversince Soviet troops marched into its capital of Kabul in the winter of 1979. Leaders of the then Mujahideen groups kept close contact and at times held strategic meetings in Haqqania. Attained spiritual guidance from its founder, the late Maulana Abdul Haq, who would dispatch in the 1980s Mujahideen contingents to Afghanistan with special prayers for their success. All this has been chronicled by Haqqania's monthly *Al-Haq* magazine.

Haqqania was set up in Akora Khat-tak in 1948 by Maulana Abdul Haq who also remained a member of Pakistan's parliament.

As a mark of enduring obligation to and association with Haqqania, many of its Afghan graduates sub-fix "Haqqani" with their name. Afghanistan's current Ambassador to Pakistan Saeedur Rehman Haqqani, it is said, is one among them.

Taliban deny deploying children

KARUL, Aug 21: The Taliban on Saturday rejected allegations by the United Nations that children had joined their ranks and were fighting on the country's front lines.

"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) has never recruited young men to its ranks and will never do so," Taliban Information Minister Mulla Amir Khan Muttagi said.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had earlier this month expressed "deep concern" over reports of the involvement in the conflict of students, some as young as 14.

On Friday UNICEF officials in Pakistan reiterated the concern. The UN alleged the Taliban had conducted a scorched earth policy along the Shamali Plains, forcing more than 100,000 people to flee villages during recent fighting. And the UN's special envoy to Afghanistan has warned against the militia using "Pakistani and Arab mercenaries", a charge Taliban authorities have denied.—AFP

DAWN
22 AUG 1999

DAWN

04 AUG 1999

Pakistan troops not fighting alongside Taliban: Kabul

ISLAMABAD, Aug 3: The Afghan Embassy here on Tuesday refuted allegations of former president Sibghatullah Mojadeddi that Pakistani nationals were fighting along with Taliban soldiers against the Northern Alliance.

"There is no presence of foreign nationals in the ranks of Taliban," an embassy statement said.

"The Afghan nation does not give any importance to such baseless and uncalled for statement by a person like Mojadeddi who has no say in the affairs of the country."

It said the former president, during his two- and a-half months rule, did nothing for the Afghan nation and, after completion of the two-month tenure, he left Afghanistan with some articles of Bait-ul-Maal."

The statement referred to the recent communique of Taliban's paramount leader Mulla Umar whereby he has invited foreign journalists and even opposition representatives to visit the frontline and see by themselves as to whether or not foreign nationals are fighting alongside the Taliban.

Taliban Information Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi on Monday took the Kabul-based foreign journalists to the frontline, north of the capital, to see for themselves whether there were any foreign troops among the Taliban ranks, the Afghan Embassy maintained.—APP

ENVOY'S CHARGE: Civil war in

Afghanistan is being stoked by foreign mercenaries, Masood Khalili, the envoy to India of ousted Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, said on Tuesday, adds AFP.

Khalili alleged Pakistan was stoking "terrorism and unrest" in Afghanistan in the "same way that it smuggled Pakistani regulars" into occupied Kashmir.

He also alleged that Pakistani pilots flew the Taliban's Russian-made MiGs which pounded Charikar, Jabul Siraj, Qarabagh and Gulbahar towns of Afghanistan on July 29.

"There is no question of a surrender. It is the duty of every Afghan to fight because no one will allow foreigners to take over their land," Khalili told a news conference in New Delhi.

"The Northern Alliance is fighting the Taliban, whose forces are made up of 3,500 Pakistani regulars and over 1,000 Arabs, sponsored by terrorist Osama bin Laden."

Khalili sought to downplay the Northern Alliance's loss of Bagram airport to Taliban forces.

"We have not used the air base actively for the past two years ... it was too close to the range of the Taliban's guns."

Military analysts attached to foreign embassies in Islamabad, said the Northern Alliance had between 10,000 and 15,000 hardened troops and could rely on 40,000 men who were willing to fight the Taliban.

DAWN 01 AUG 1999

Omar denies Pakistan troop presence

PESHAWAR, July 31: Afghanistan's Taliban Supreme leader Mulla Muhammad Omar has dismissed reports that Pakistani troops were fighting alongside militia against the beleaguered opposition forces in the north of the war-ravaged country, the private AIP news agency reported on Saturday.

"There is no Pakistan soldier in our ranks," Taliban spokesman Mulla Abdul Hayee Motmain quoted his chief as saying in a statement released at the militia's Kandahar headquarter in southwestern Afghanistan on Friday.

Motmain, however, admitted to the presence of a few "Pakistani Taliban," who follow Afghanistan's radical Taliban as model, in their ranks.

"These (Pakistani Taliban) are the Mujahideen who took part in Afghan war against Soviet occupation and communist system," in 1970s and 1980s.

United Nations peace envoy for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, has warned that involvement of Pakistani and Arab militants in Afghan civil war, "could rebound on their countries of origin," according to press reports.—dpa

Refugees asked to leave Panjsher

KABUL (AFP) - The Taliban militia on Wednesday urged refugees who have taken shelter in the opposition-held Panjsher Valley to leave and promised a guarantee of safe passage.

"We are ready to help them and we will give them necessary assistance," Mullah Amir Khan Muttaqi, Taliban information minister said. He told journalists the opposition had breached international humanitarian law by using non-combatants and their homes during recent heavy fighting on the Shomali Plains north of Kabul.

NATION

05 AUG 1999

Taliban want direct talks with UN

ISLAMABAD (PPI)—Taliban are ready for talks aimed at resolving the Afghan conflict and ending fighting in Afghanistan, but blame that the opponent do not want to resolve their problems with Islamic Emirate by easy means and give up rebellion.

'However, we want to hold direct talks with the United Nations because the opponents misuse the diplomatic channels that are at their disposal. They are propagating and giving the impression that Taliban are opposed to peace and stability in Afghanistan. They want to cover their problems and weak points. They have spent their whole life in fighting and we want their life to be exposed to the people, the spokesman of Taliban Maulvi Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil told VoA on Tuesday.

Answering a question, he said Taliban would first discuss its problems, some realities and facts with the mediator so that time should not be wasted on the so-called negotiations. 'We have no problem to take part in the parleys for resolving the Afghan issue rather we prefer them because this is the easy way for the Afghans and Afghanistan,' he

observed.

He said Taliban are trying to hold talks with the mediator on some facts and realities. 'We are still not sure that the opponents wholeheartedly want to resolve the problems through talks. They offer peace talks, but in the meantime continue military operations as well,' he maintained. Muttawakil stressed that the Islamic Emirate have attended a number of peace talks and never expressed opposition to negotiations. The opponents regrettably always benefit from the process of talks, and always want to seek time so that they could make war preparation.

He recalled that during the meeting of Six-plus-Two group in Tashkent last month, the opponents continued their operations and aggression in Samangan and Dara-e-Saaf. They also rocketed Kabul when UN Special Envoy on Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi was in the Afghan capital. We have always expressed concern that the opponents do not want to resolve their problems with the Islamic Emirate through easy means and give up rebellion. We have always supported negotiations.

NATION

11 AUG 1999

Taliban support for Osama undiminished

KABUL (AFP) - On the eve of the first anniversary of US missile attacks against Afghanistan, the ruling Taliban

Tuesday reiterated its support for Osama bin Laden and launched an appeal to Muslim's to back them against any further US military action.

Through the official media here and a barrage of statements abroad, militia authorities are warning Washington is about to carry out another military strike against the Taliban for harbouring bin Laden.

However, there were no signs that Taliban supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar would relent and hand over the Saudi dissident, wanted in connection with a string of crimes across the Middle East and Africa.

Instead the headline Islamic leader complained the US is pressuring the

militia because of their beliefs, based on Islamic Sharia.

'American pressure is only directed at us. If there is any pressure from the United Nations or any other party that is also emanating from the American pressure,' Omar said.

'Therefore we call upon the world Muslims to back, support and help us,' he told the official Radio Shar-iat.

Osama has lived as a 'welcomed guest' in Afghanistan since 1996 when the militia's campaign to seize control of Afghanistan was gaining momentum. Since then they have won control of most of the country.

Taliban Minister of Information Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi said Osama's status has not changed, adding, 'this is the position of the people of Afghanistan'.

NATION

11 AUG 1999

Taliban reaffirm support to Osama

KABUL (AFP) - On the eve of the anniversary of the US missile attack against Afghanistan, the Taliban Thursday reaffirmed its support to Osama bin Laden and accused Washington of conducting international terrorism.

Mulla Mohammad Rabbani, the militia number two, said that Washington was using the Osama issue as a means to pressure the Taliban government to submit to US demands.

'Osama is our guest and it is the custom of Afghans and Muslims to respect and care for the guest.

'We are Muslims and we do not deem it right to allow the case of a Muslim to be decided in a non-Muslim court,' he said, commenting on US demands for the extradition of the Saudi dissident.

'America itself conducts acts of global terrorism by launching missile attacks against Afghanistan and Sudan. Who is going to compensate this?' Rabbani asked.

'They accuse us, and put pressure on us to make the Islamic Emirate accept their way and religion,' he said.

The Taliban leader asserted that Osama was not allowed to use Afghanistan for launching activities against other countries. He called for a negotiated solution of the issue concerning Osama.

Rabbani vowed that Washington's pressure cannot force the Taliban into submission.

He also said the people of Dagestan, Kashmir, Palestine and Chechnya should be given their freedom, accusing the United Nations and the international community of turning a blind eye to the violation of human rights in these regions.

The problems of the world Muslims would come to an end if they stopped fighting each other, he said, adding the Muslim crusade should continue till the end to thwart the plots by non-believers.

He attacked the United Nations and the international community for criticizing the militia for violating human rights and said the Taliban practice was based on Islamic Sharia law.

'We have given to the women what Islam has allowed,' Rabbani said.

NNI adds: Mutaqqi stressed that differences between Taliban and the United States should be resolved through talks. Problems could not be solved through force, he insisted saying Taliban are ready to settle issues with Washington through talks.

The United States rained Tomahawk missiles on Afghanistan's southern province of Khost one year ago to kill Osama but he remained unhurt. Washington accuses the Saudi national of masterminding bombing of American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya on August 7, which killed more than 220 people including 12 Americans.

Afghan FM arriving tomorrow

ISLAMABAD, Aug 22: Afghan Foreign Minister Mulla Mohammad Hassan Akhund would arrive here on Tuesday (Aug 24) on a four-day visit to Pakistan for talks on a number of issues, including Afghan transit trade, officials said on Sunday.

Mulla Hassan would lead a high-level delegation, including ministers, the officials told NNI.

The Afghan foreign minister would hold talks with his Pakistani counterpart Sartaj Aziz on bilateral issues, especially transit trade, the officials said.

Pakistan had imposed restrictions on Afghan transit trade two years ago, on the grounds that most of the goods, imported under a transit trade agreement, were smuggled into Pakistan, which adversely affected its local industry, the officials said.

The Taliban had repeatedly asked Pakistan to lift the restrictions on the transit trade and release goods at Karachi port.

Islamabad's fresh diplomatic efforts would also come under discussion, the officials said.—NNI

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Taliban offer talks to US on Osama

PESHAWAR, Aug 21: Taliban on Saturday hinted at possible readiness to discuss with the United States the long-standing issue of the expulsion of Osama bin Laden by saying all difficulties could be solved peacefully, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) agency reported.

'Weapons and force will not do,' the AIP said quoting an Afghan Foreign Ministry statement on the anniversary of US missile strikes against alleged terrorist bases run by Osama Bin Laden.

The statement did not mention Laden by name, but condemned the attacks last year saying: 'The Americans should refrain from repeating the blunders that the

British and the Russians committed by invading Afghanistan.'

'What the Americans did last year in their bid to get Laden was not only in violation of the international law, but also put a big question mark against the support the Americans provided to Afghan mujahideen during their struggle against the Soviet Russians,' the statement issued in Kabul said.

It said the Americans used to vaunt the areas they hit last year as 'bases of freedom' but they declared these places as 'strongholds of terrorists' after the Soviet Union collapsed, the foreign ministry said adding that peaceful conflict resolution was always the best way to deal with issues.—dpa

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Taliban reiterate warning to US against attack

ABU DHABI (Internews)—The Taliban have warned the United States of a fate similar to that of the erstwhile Soviet Union if it dares attack Afghanistan to kill Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden.

"America will face the same fate as the Soviet Union if it carries out any military action against Afghanistan," Mulla Mohammed Rabbani, the number two official of the Taliban said in an exclusive interview to Al-Itihad newspaper, published here Sunday.

Rabbani said it was futile for the US to attack Afghanistan because Laden was never in the same place. "Brother Osama is always on the move. Every day he is in a different region," he said.

The top Taliban official who chairs the ruling Council of Ministers, said he had no idea where the United States could attack when asked about the likely targets which could be bombed to kill Laden.

Confirming that the Taliban was in the know of the rumours about the existence of US commandos and aircraft equipped with missiles in Pakistan, he said he did not care.

"The people are talking about it but the government of the Islamic Emirate does not care about it. We tell America that it can bring any number of forces and attack any target, but in all cases its fate will be failure after failure. This is the inevitable result," he said.

"I advise America not to follow the fate of the Russians," he said.

"America practices international terrorism itself but accuses others of it,"

Rabbani stated. "What it is doing in Palestine and Iraq? And what did it do last year against Afghanistan and Sudan?" he asked.

"It actually uses the Osama bin Laden issue as an excuse in order to take revenge against the Islamic government in Afghanistan and wants to subject us to its laws and orders, which we will not let happen," he asserted.

US steps up drive against Osama

WASHINGTON (PPI)—Washington has stepped up its campaign against Osama bin Laden, and has announced a reward of five million dollars for providing information about the last year embassy bombing in Africa.

The US campaign is in form of a thirty-second television commercial which the US government is sending to its embassies around the world.

It is expected that US embassies will persuade as many countries as possible to air the commercial containing a graphic footage of the bombings and an appeal for information. The US government wants this video seen around the world by as many people as possible, said BBC television in its report.

The US has charged Osama bin Laden with the embassy bombing and Osama is now on the FBI's most wanted list for sometime.

Rabbani threatened that if Washington carried out its threats by bombing Afghanistan, it would be very serious and the Islamic emirate would not stand with its hands tied.

He said that the Laden issue could not be resolved through force and that dialogue was the best means for reaching a solution.

"Osama came to Afghanistan under the administration of former President Burhanuddin Rabbani so he is the guest of Afghanistan and our customs and faith

bar the eviction of a guest or handing him over to his enemies," he asserted.

Asked by the Al-Itihad newspaper if the Taliban would accept the trial of Laden in a neutral state, which recognises Taliban as a government and has no hostility towards Laden, such as the United Arab Emirates, Rabbani was evasive in his reply.

"America has so far not produced any proof about Osama's involvement [in terrorism] and therefore there is no justification for his trial anywhere," he replied. "If America produces convincing proof about his involvement in the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam bombings, we will try him in the courts of Afghanistan," he added.

Afghan Foreign Minister calls on President

ISLAMABAD (APP) — The Afghan Foreign Minister Mullah Muhammad Hassan Akhund on Thursday called on President Muhammad Rafiq Tarar.

He was accompanied by Mullah Amir Khan Mutaqi, Minister of Information & Culture, Mullah Abdul Razaq Akhund, Minister Commerce, Molvi Jalaluddin Haqqani, Minister of Frontiers, Moulvi Abdul Raqib, Minister of Refugees and Martyred, Mullah Hamdullah Nomani, Minister for Higher Education, Dr. Abdul Satar Paktees, Chief of Protocol, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Saeedur Rehman Haqqani, Afghan Charge d'Affairs in Islamabad.

The President emphasized the importance of establishing peace in Afghanistan. Peace, he said, was a prerequisite for progress and prosperity.

The Afghan Foreign Minister stated that his government wanted to bring peace to Afghanistan. He also appreciated the latest peace initiative of the Government of Pakistan. The further expansion of economic and commercial cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan were also discussed.

The meeting was also attended by the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Siddique Khan Kanjo and senior officials of the Foreign Office.

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Muttiqi admits talks on Osama with US

Afghanistan does not rule out foreign hand behind blast

ISLAMABAD (NNI): The Afghan Information Minister Amir Khan Muttiqi, did not rule out foreign hand in the Kandhar blast. He however, said that Taliban so far have not blamed any body for this blast. A

Addressing a press conference on Tuesday evening he said that no person has been arrested so far and investigation in this effect are continued. Muttiqi said that the blast was well organized and the latest material was used in the explosion. "The latest material used in the explosion is enough to believe that a foreign hand is behind the Kandhar blast," he said and added that it was a terrorist act "we strongly condemn it."

A truck loaded with explosive materials exploded near the residence of the Taliban supreme leader Mulla Omar in the southwestern Afghan city of Kandahar on Tuesday killing 10 on the spot. Six Taliban soldiers and four passers-by were killed when Taliban tried to remove the truck, parked by an unidentified driver adjacent to the residence of Mulla Omar, head of Taliban information department in Kandahar.

Replying to a question about Pakistan peace efforts to Afghanistan, he said that Islamabad has not given any specific proposal but he added that Taliban welcome Pakistan's peace effort. The opposition alliance instead of appreciating Pakistani peace efforts launched a baseless propaganda against Islamabad. He said that speaking against the Pakistani peace efforts to Afghanistan by opposition "shows they

want to continue fighting." About Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, he said that Taliban had held talks with the President Bill Clinton's administration at Tashkent and as well in Washington. He however, ruled out any talks with the United States in Pakistan. "There were no talks between US and Taliban in Islamabad."

He said, "Osama is our guest and Afghan people always respect their guests." He added that the government of Taliban would defend the Afghan traditions in Osama's case as well.

About the Iranian diplomat killing in Mazar sharif last year, he said that there has been so far no success, to find out the culprit. Last year a Iranian diplomat and other staffers were killed when some armed persons attacked Iranian diplomatic mission. "It might have been the action of those who did not want good relations between Taliban and Iran and we will investigate it for sure," he said.

The Afghan foreign minister leading a delegation including six ministers and other senior officials is leaving on Friday (today) to home after a four-day stay in Islamabad. During his stay the minister called on President Rafiq Tarar, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz and other high ups to further cement bilateral and brotherly ties.

The minister also holds important talks on Afghan Transit Trade Agreement, return of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan and to enhance further trade and economic relations.

Afghans ready to talk on Osama

By Faraz Hashmi

ISLAMABAD, Aug 26: Afghan lionaire in terrorist activities. The Information Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said on Thursday the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan was ready to discuss the issue of Osama bin Laden with "anybody, at any time and anywhere in the world."

Asked whether the bin Laden issue was raised during their talks with Pakistan authorities, he declined to answer the question. However, he recalled that they had discussed the issue with the United States in Tashkent and in the United States.

Commenting on the reports of Israeli and Indian involvement in bin Laden was using the Afghan Rabbani was being supported by Israel. He said that recently the Indian government had sent some technicians to the Panjsher valley of Afghanistan to collect evidence to help Ahmed Shah Masood of alleged involvement of Saudi bil-

forces.

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Taliban start probe into Kandahar blast

Mullah Omar survives big explosion

ISLAMABAD, Aug 24: Afghanistan's supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, survived a big explosion near his house in Kandahar city on Tuesday night, AIP reported.

AIP said a resident of the city reached by phone could not explain the explosion but said it damaged Omar's house and jolted a large number of others.

Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan, is the headquarters of the Taliban movement. First reports said there were many casualties and serious damage.

Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoted residents as saying the explosion happened at 10.30pm.

"The blast was so big that everyone thought it had happened in their area," AIP reported.

"People ran from their houses, windows were broken and there was panic and confusion. No one knows what caused the explosions," the agency said.

It said that people ran from their houses fearing they were under bombardment but the cause of the explosion or explosions was not immediately known.

AIP said some residents believed it might be another US attack on suspected hideouts of Osama bin Laden, who is a "guest" of Taliban movement which controls most of Afghanistan, but there was no confirmation of this.

"Some people feared this might be another US cruise missile attack to get Osama but nobody knows, it is confusion," AIP reported.

The US launched cruise missile attacks against bin Laden on Aug 20 last year in retaliation for the bombing of its Kenyan and Tanzanian embassies which killed 200.

He has been variously reported as living near Kandahar and the eastern town of Jalalabad and nearby mountains but his exact whereabouts are a mystery.—DPA/Reuters

KABUL, Aug 26: Ruling Taliban movement said on Thursday it was investigating the huge blast outside the residence of its supreme leader, Mulla Mohammad Omar, in Kandahar.

A Taliban official said from Kandahar that authorities were looking into Tuesday night's explosion that killed at least 10 people, including three of Omar's security guards, and wounded more than 40.

"No suspect has been arrested. We are at the earliest stage and can't give you details of the investigation now. With God's grace, the culprits of the incident will be traced soon," the official, Jahangirwal, told Reuters.

High-intensity explosives packed in barrels in a truck caused the blast, the first in the Taliban's seat of power.

The Taliban says Omar was not injured in the blast, which officials have blamed on the enemies of "Islam and the country".

The Kandahar explosion occurred during a major Taliban offensive against Masood north of

Kabul and efforts by Pakistan to get Masood to the negotiating table.

Masood's supporters said the blast was a sign of local hatred of the Taliban.

SECURITY NET: Taliban authorities have cast a wide security net across southern Afghanistan after the attack.

Senior Taliban spokesman Abdul Hai Mutmaen said the would-be assassins had directly targeted Omar. "It seems the plot had been worked on for years, or at least a year."

"Investigations are under way, we are alert to our enemies," he added.

Sources said exit routes out of Kandahar near Spin Boldak on the Pakistan border, to Herat in the west and Ghazni in the north were being tightly monitored as a man-hunt continues for the bombers.

The Taliban says three people drove the truck to Kandahar and parked it along the Herat Highway, within a short distance of Omar's house.—Reuters/AFP

Mullah Omar suspects foreign hand in blast

ISLAMABAD, Aug 28: Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar on Saturday said some "foreign hand" was behind a truck bombing in his home base city of Kandahar but that the United States was "not involved."

"It was a political act involving some foreign hand," the Taliban chief told the AIP.

"The United States was not involved, it had no hand in the explosion," Omar said, speaking to the Pakistan-based AIP from Kandahar, the Taliban's headquarters city where the massive explosion occurred on Tuesday close to his home.

An investigation was underway, he said, vowing the culprits would be arrested.

"Those responsible cannot escape."

Taliban officials have said the blast, which killed 10 people and caused widespread devastation, was aimed at killing Omar.—AFP

Taliban tighten security after Kandahar blast

ISLAMABAD (NNI) — The Afghan ruling Taliban have strengthened security in southern Afghanistan after a truck bomb blast killed 10 people and narrowly missed their supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar.

All roads out of Kandahar, the Taliban's headquarters in southern Afghanistan, have been under tight monitoring for bombers, Afghan sources here said on Thursday.

The explosion took place late Tuesday after three people had parked the truck near Omar's house. Taliban security guards had told the people on the truck to remove it, but they said it had broken down and then left to "look for help."

In the back of the truck were six barrels of explosives, which went off when the guards tried to remove the truck. According to the sources, the explosive device was very simple, but the explosion was massive, leaving 10 people dead and dozens injured.

Taliban authorities have blamed the blast on the "enemies of Islam" but have been careful not to single out suspects.

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Mulla Omar was target of blast

KABUL (AFP) - Taliban authorities have cast a wide security net across southern Afghanistan after a truck bomb left 10 dead and narrowly missed killing its target, supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar.

Senior Taliban spokesman Abdul Hai Mutmaen said the would-be assassins had directly targeted Omar. 'It seems the plot had been worked on for years, or at least a year.'

'Investigations are under way, we are alert to our enemies,' he added.

Sources said exit routes out of Kandahar near Spin Boldak on the Pakistan border, to Herat in the west and Ghazni in the north were being tightly monitored as a manhunt continues for the bombers.

The Taliban say three people drove the truck to Kandahar and parked it along the Herat Highway, within a short

distance of Omar's house.

Security guards asked them to remove the truck but the driver told them it had broken down and they left to find help. In the back of the truck were about six barrels crammed with explosives.

Diplomatic sources in Pakistan said the detonator was basic, two wires slightly ajar which set-off the explosion after the security guards outside Omar's decided to remove the truck. Three guards were killed instantly.

'It was a very simple device,' one diplomatic source said.

But the explosion was massive, blowing out windows up to a kilometre away and injuring a further 60 people.

Official Taliban media said Omar and his family escaped the attack unscathed.

Radio Shariat quoted the hardline Islamic leader as saying, 'such incidents can never make the believers lose their will and faith. Rather such incidents make them ready for more sacrifices.'

However, Omar has not been sighted by independent witnesses since the blast late on Tuesday evening although Mutmaen reiterated that Omar was home at the time of the blast and stressed the Taliban leader was unhurt.

Authorities have blamed the blast on the 'enemies of Islam' but have been careful not to single out suspects.

'We do not hold any particular group or country responsible for this,' Mutmaen said.

The Afghan opposition, which has fought a five year civil war against the Taliban, has denied any involvement

as has the United States. Washington has demanded the Taliban hand over alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden who is accused of masterminding the bombing of two US embassies in east Africa on August 7 1998.

The US retaliated two weeks later with a missile strike on Afghanistan where bin Laden has found sanctuary with like-minded Islamic militants and lived a short distance from Omar's house.

Since then Washington has maintained further military strikes remain an option unless the Taliban deliver bin Laden to a third country where he can be tried.

In Kabul, tensions appeared to have eased after all foreigners were advised to stay in-doors during the immediate hours after the blast.

Omar says US not behind Kandahar blast

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - Taliban supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar Saturday said the United States is not behind the Kandahar blast.

In an interview with the VOA Push-to service Omar said foreign hand is involved in the Wednesday blast but the United States is not involved in the incident.

A truck loaded with explosive materials exploded near the residence of the Taliban supreme leader Mulla Omar in the southwestern Afghan City of Kandahar killing 10 and injuring 30 others. The truck was parked just three houses away from Omar's home. However, he escaped unhurt.

Omar said investigations into the explosion are continuing. However, no person has so far been arrested. 'No one would be spared if found guilty in the blast,' he said.

The Taliban supreme leader condemned the incident saying it was a big explosion, which had also caused losses to lives and property.

Taliban officials are investigating how the truck loaded with explosive materials could have reached near Omar's residence, and who was the driver.

Meanwhile, a US State Department spokesman condemned the Kandahar blast as alleged act of terrorism and expressed sympathy with the affected people.

'We condemn all acts of terrorism, especially the explosion in Kandahar,' the spokesman said, reports VOA.

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War-weary Afghans dismiss factional battles as a solution

KABUL (AFP) - War-weary residents of Kabul, two-thirds of which is in ruins after years of factional battles, have greeted the latest round of fighting with a mixture of gloom and disgust.

'This is merciless. Only Afghans are killed on both sides and Afghan property is being destroyed,' said taxi driver Abdul Rahim.

'Somebody should stop this. We have plenty of widows, orphans and handicapped people anyway.'

Afghanistan has suffered huge losses in both human and material terms from the past 20 years of war, which began with the December 1979 Soviet invasion.

The UN and foreign aid groups operating here are also suffering as the outside world and donor nations grow increasingly tired of Afghanistan's inability to settle its conflicts.

One pensioner said Kabul has thousands of widows and beggars and its infrastructure is in ruins while the ruling Taliban militia 'is trying to push its juggernaut all over the country'.

The purist Islamic militia, now in control of about 80 percent of the coun-

try, launched an offensive last Wednesday to crush opposition forces led by former defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood.

'I have heard the stories of back and forth movements for so many years. What we want is peace, not the fratricidal war,' said Mohammad Aziz, a retired civil servant.

Afghan leaders, he said, had yet to realise the futility of war.

'This is useless. Who now cares about those fighters who died in the previous hostilities between the communists and the mujahideen and then between the various factions?' he said.

After a decade of battling mujahideen guerrillas the Soviet Union pulled out of Afghanistan in February 1989. They left behind a Moscow-backed communist regime which was toppled by the mujahideen three years later.

After seizing power, the mujahadeen factions turned on each other. The ethnic Pashtun Taliban emerged from the south and under a strict interpretation of Islamic law vowed to end the 'evil and corrupt forces' of the mujahideen.

Last Wednesday the militia launched

its summer offensive against Masood's men.

'They are attacking each other like wolves, using all the strength they can muster,' said Mohammad Asghar as a Taliban jet screeched overhead to bomb the frontlines 25 kilometers north of here.

Recent battles have been concentrated in the Shamali plains. Rocket strikes and artillery barrages are clearly audible to the capital's residents.

The fighting erupted after United Nations special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi failed to persuade the Taliban to halt plans for its offensive and to continue peace talks.

His visit followed a meeting in Tashkent of the Six-Plus-Two group.

The group comprises Afghanistan's neighbours - Iran, Pakistan, China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan - plus the United States and Russia. It was formed two years ago to try to find a peace formula.

Residents, who have seen a series of failed missions since the late 1980s, scoff at UN peacemaking efforts.

'This is also a waste of time and money,' said former civil servant Aziz.

ICRC again suspends Kabul flights

ISLAMABAD, Aug 16: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has again cancelled flights to Afghan capital Kabul for second time within a month, ICRC sources said on Monday.

The ICRC had resumed flights to Kabul on Aug 3 but again suspended the operation at the weekend for security reasons, the sources said.

Both the ICRC and United Nations had suspended flights to Afghan capital after the Kabul airport was hit by rockets, the weekend alliance by Afghan opposition resumed after Taliban forces overran provincial capitals of Parwan and Kapisa provinces of Parwan.

Strategic Bagram air base and Jabul Straj late last month. However, the flight operation was again suspended after the forces of Commander Ahmed Shah Masood recaptured the areas from where they can hit Kabul airport, being used by Taliban for civilian and military purposes.—NNI

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Kabul seeks UNHCR, Pakistan help to overcome problems

Afghanistan may not sustain refugees burden

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR — Maulvi Abdul Raqeeb, Refugees Repatriation Minister of the Islamic Emirates Afghanistan has said that their government welcomes repatriation of the refugees but owing to financial crunch, the government may not sustain the burden of refugees.

"To ensure complete repatriation and rehabilitation of the refugees, the UNHCR, Pakistan and other donors need to take active part in rebuilding and reconstruction of Afghanistan," he remarked while addressing a Press conference here at Afghan Consulate General on Tuesday afternoon.

The Afghan minister for refugees repatriation, is currently leading an 8-member delegation to attend the tripartite conference on Afghan refugees repatriation being held in Peshawar.

Maulvi Abdul Raqeeb said that during the two days tri-partite meeting, the participants representing UNHCR, Pakistan and Islamic Emirates Afghanistan had held lengthy debates over ways and means regarding repatriation of refugees to their motherland.

He said although they held detailed talks over the issue, final schedule for starting complete repatriation of the Afghan refugees from Pakistan is still awaited. In this connection, he told the

tripartite meeting to help the Afghan government in provision of economic, agriculture, employment, health, education, communication and other facilities.

He was of the view that after getting facilities to refugees, the UNHCR, Pakistan and others could get rid of the influx of Afghan refugees.

In response to a question, Maulvi Abdul Raqeeb disagreed with the impression that Taliban leaders are not sincere to their declared general amnesty. He said that in the light of general amnesty, the Afghans need to honour policies of the Islamic government.

However, he was reluctant to say that according to general amnesty all previous misdeeds and wrong doings of the citizens had been forgiven. He alleged that not only former communists but even majority of the Mujahideen were still resisting policies of the Islamic government.

"We never send youngsters forcibly to the war fronts," was his reply when diverted his attention towards the recent reports pertaining to sending of youngsters forcibly to war fronts by Taliban. He added that their opponents, particularly Ahmad Shah Masud, are known for sending the youngsters forcibly to the war fronts.

Answering to a question, Maulvi Abdul Raqeeb confirmed that Afghan

issue was yet to be resolved but he rejected the allegations that Taliban were reluctant to enter into dialogues for a negotiated solution to the conflict. He added that since their emergence, Taliban had time and again participated in direct and indirect negotiations. He blamed the opposition for rejecting the UN, OIC and other countries call for a cease-fire.

Answering to yet another question, Maulvi Abdul Raqeeb confirmed that there exists from 50,000 to 60,000 Tadjik refugees in Taliban controlled areas of Kabul and Jalalabad but he dispelled the impression that they had made hostages such people. He claimed that such families had been migrated to Taliban controlled areas. In response to a question, he said that there is no restriction against such people if they want to go back to their houses. He added that according to its own obligations, the Islamic Emirates is providing due facilities to these war-displaced refugees.

Maulvi Abdul Raqeeb said that next meeting on Afghan refugees repatriation will be held in Kabul. However, its date and time is yet to be announced.

He, while answering to a question, also confirmed that Iranian authorities were forcibly ejecting the Afghan refugees. In this connection, he said that refugees returning to Herat, Farah, Jauzjan and other provinces have confirmed such reports.

High level meeting reviews repatriation of refugees

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR - In connection with repatriation of the Afghan refugees, 9th meeting of the Tripartite Repatriation Commission was held in Peshawar with NWFP Chief Minister Sardar Mehtab Ahmad Khan in the chair, on Monday.

The meeting besides others was attended by an 8-member delegation from Afghanistan headed by Refugees Minister Maulvi Abdul Raqeeb, Chief of the UNHCR mission in Pakistan, Gulzar Khan Commissioner Afghan Refugees, Federal Secretary for States and Frontier Regions (SAFRAN) and others.

The meeting which continued for several hours discussed in depth the outcome of the previous meeting as well as constraints being faced for the honourable and safe return of Afghan refugees to their motherland.

Almost all the participants were of the view that besides creating conducive atmosphere in Afghanistan, it is also must that economic activities are geared up. The UNHCR representatives briefed the meeting about the repatriation process of the refugees. The UNHCR also informed about its standard package being given to the returning refugees from both Iran and Pakistan.

During proceedings of the meeting, the Afghan minister for refugees Maulvi Abdul Raqeeb confessed that unless proper economic opportunities, it could

be impossible for the concerned quarters to get maximum repatriation of the refugees. He added that international community needs to fulfill its responsibilities in this connection and must extend financial support to the Islamic government.

The NWFP Chief Minister, Sardar Mehtab Ahmad Khan said that launching of large scale reconstruction is the only solution to the repatriation of the Afghan refugees. No doubt, he said, the UNHCR and other donors had contributed greatly towards the weal of the Afghan refugees in the first phase of the Afghan issue yet with the withdrawal of the Russian forces, the sudden stoppage of the assistance had not only enhanced miseries of the refugees but had also caused difficulties for Pakistan.

Similarly, he said, the repatriation process is also not an easy task and demanded whole-hearted and sincere efforts besides the material support which is also a great challenge both for the UNHCR and for the Afghan government. Therefore, he said, the UNHCR must approach the donor agencies to seek generous assistance for the rehabilitation of the refugees.

The Chief Minister further said, with the passage of time, the situation in Pakistan especially in this part of the country is also becoming a matter of concern and it would also be equally important to facilitate the speedy return of refugees. For this purposes, Sardar

Mehtab Ahmad Khan suggested for the creation of a permanent forum.

As far as our government is concerned, the Chief Minister said, "we are ready to extend all possible assistance in accordance with the proposals and plans of the UNHCR."

The Refugees Minister of Islamic Emirate Afghanistan Maulvi Abdul Raqeeb in his remarks thanked the people and government of Pakistan as well as the donor agencies for their assistance and keen interest for looking after the repatriation of Afghan refugees.

While giving the policy statement of his government, the Afghan minister said, "we are not only making hectic efforts for the repatriation as well as rehabilitation of the refugees from Pakistan and Iran but would also welcome the return of the Afghans living in any part of the world."

As far as, the peace and conducive atmosphere is concerned, it is very much there in almost 90 per cent area of Afghanistan but we need concrete assistance for generation of economic activities in the country.

While giving sectorial priorities in this connection, he said, agriculture development, reconstruction and strengthening of health institutions and rehabilitation of infra-structural network particularly the communication system together with provision of education facilities is the demand of the hour.

Tripartite Commission to meet in Kabul next month

ISLAMABAD (APP) - To accelerate its efforts for rehabilitation of Afghan Refugees the Tripartite Repatriation Commission on Afghan Displaced Persons will meet in Kabul next month.

The agenda of 10th meeting is to create enabling conditions in the South East provinces of Afghanistan adjacent to Pakistan so that the refugees staying here could be sent back.

The meeting will be attended by Chief Commissioner Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, Commissioner Afghan Refugees Peshawar, representatives from Pakistan's Foreign Office and SAFRON, UNHCR members and Kabul's representatives.

An official of Commissioner for Afghan Refugees told the agency on Monday that it is the common concern of all three members of Tripartite Com-

mission, Pakistan, Afghanistan and United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

But, he said, lot of ground work needed to be done before taking final steps for sending back Afghan Refugees to their motherland.

"First of all the land-mines in the area are the main concern. Without sweeping these mines it would be difficult to undertake infrastructure development in the area," the official said.

He said, health and communication facilities are other sectors which should be developed before starting the process of rehabilitation. "There should be enabling conditions to attract the refugees."

The same views were expressed by the Afghan Minister who participated in the 9th meeting of the Commission. Afghan minister, Maulvi Abdul

Raqeeb, spelling out his government's policy, had said, his administration was not only making hectic efforts for repatriation but also rehabilitation of the Displaced Persons from Pakistan and Iran. "We will also welcome the return of Afghans living in other parts of the world."

But, he said, as regards sectorial priorities, agricultural development, reconstruction and strengthening of health institutions and rehabilitation of infrastructure network, particularly in the communication sector, together with provision of educational facilities were the need of the hour.

There is strong possibility that a representative of NWFP will also attend 10th meeting of the Commission to be held in September as the Chief Minister NWFP has been taking keen interest in rehabilitation process.

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Afghans protest in Tehran against Taliban 'repression'

TEHRAN (AFP) - A veiled Afghan woman called here Friday for an end to the Taliban's 'medieval' repression in her homeland as several hundred Afghan refugees demonstrated outside UN offices against the militia's 'crimes.'

The woman, clad in a black chador, condemned 'the Taliban's campaign of repression, especially against women, in Afghanistan.'

'This medieval group has imprisoned an entire people, and no one can move,' she said, calling for UN intervention 'to stop the massacres perpetrated by the Taliban' in neighboring Afghanistan.

About 300 Afghans, most of them refugees residing in Iran, participated in the rally organized by Afghans living here and Islamic groups.

They called for the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, currently chaired by Tehran, to intervene with Pakistan 'to halt its military interference and role' on behalf of the Taliban.

They chanted slogans against Taliban leader Mullah Omar and the United States and called for peace in Afghanistan.

Several demonstrators carried pictures of Afghan opposition commander Ahmed Shah Massoud, but organizers asked them to put the pictures aside.

The Afghan opposition, supported by Iran, accuses the Taliban of massacring several hundred villagers during its offensive north of Kabul in late July.

On August 5, the opposition commander took back positions that the Taliban had seized.

Iran does not recognize the Taliban government, which ousted President Burhanuddin Rabbani in 1996, and has vowed not to normalize relations with the Islamic militia until it arrests those responsible for the murder of nine Iranians in Afghanistan last year.

The Taliban have never admitted killing the eight Iranian diplomats and one journalist, who were slain when the militia captured the northern Afghan town of Mazar-i-Sharif.

UN refuses to help new Afghan refugees

ISLAMABAD, Aug 20: United Nations relief agencies in Afghanistan have flatly refused to extend any assistance to persons displaced by factional fighting in that country.

This categorical statement was made by the UN Chief Coordinator for Afghanistan Mr Broneck Szynalski at a news conference at the UN Information Centre here on Friday.

He said it is not the intention of the UN to provide humanitarian assistance to them because it is a man-made emergency and must be resolved by those involved in it.

He said bulk of people seem to have moved to Kabul numbering between 30,000 to 40,000 along with their families. The UN has given the warring factions 20 days notice to settle down these people back in their homes, adding they have reports that some families have gone back.

Without knowing the actual figure of the persons in the Panjsher valley, he estimated that 60,000 to 70,000 persons were there, but they would try to send missions or check from NGOs as to how they these people were being taken care of.

He said there are another 10,000 displaced persons from northern Afghanistan who have sought shelter in different parts of the country with some staying with their friends and relatives.

The UNICEF representative Louis G. Arsenault was unable to give the exact number of children fighting in Afghanistan and only said that "children between the ages of 15 and 35 are involved in the fighting." He could not make a distinction between children and young men.—PPI

Afghan DPs protest in Tehran

TEHRAN, Aug 13: A veiled Afghan woman called here on Friday for an end to the Taliban's "mediaeval" repression in her homeland 'as several hundred Afghan refugees demonstrated outside UN offices against the militia's "crimes."

The woman, clad in a black chador, condemned "the Taliban's campaign of repression, especially against women, in Afghanistan."

"This mediaeval group has imprisoned an entire people, and no one can move," she said, calling for UN intervention "to stop the massacres perpetrated by the Taliban" in neighbouring Afghanistan.

About 300 Afghans, most of them refugees residing in Iran, participated in the rally organized by Afghans living here.—AFP

DAWN

14 AUG 1999

DAWN

DAWN

21 AUG 1999

NATION

04 AUG 1999

Mujaddedi asks Nawaz to order Pakistanis, Arabs to quit Afghanistan

Professor Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, Chief of Afghan National Liberation Front and former President of Afghanistan, has once again come out with strong criticism on Pakistan whom he off-repeated calls as his second home. This time he has sent a letter to Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif expressing his concern over involvement of Pakistanis and Arabs in the Afghan infightings. Mojaddedi has asked the Premier to issue an order for Pakistanis and Arabs to leave Afghanistan.

Following is the text of letter. His Excellency Mohammad Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of The Islamic Republic of Pakistan Islamabad.

Dear Brother, 'I pray Almighty for your health and success. Dear brother, for the last three days, the Taliban have launched the offensive of their opponents that unfortunately as a consequence, a larger number of civilians including women and children have been killed.

According to reliable piece of information and similarly in accordance with a report carried by daily *Mashreq* dat-

ed 29 July 1999 as well as *The Frontier Post* dated 30th, July 1999 around five thousand Pakistani, and four hundred Arabs residents in Pakistan have been heavily involved in these battles.

As you have already resolved the Kargil crisis with your characteristic vision thus relieving the world of a major disaster, I as your Muslim brother strongly urge you to issue an order for the Pakistani nationals and Arabs to immediately leave Afghanistan.

Undoubtedly, this move will salvage the defenceless people of Afghanistan from the clutch of horrendous death. Otherwise God forbid the responsibility of tragic fate of numerous defenceless Muslims including women, children, widows and orphans will rest on you which as your well-wisher brother I do not wish that such grave responsibility lies on your shoulder on the Day of Judgment before Almighty.

Sincerely Yours, Prof. Sibghatullah Al-Mojaddedi" This letter was not only despatched to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif but also circulated in the foreign and Pakistani

media. This is not the first time Mojaddedi has appeared as vocal against Pakistan but in the past too he has been openly criticising Pakistan. During Afghan war he used to criticise Ziaul Haq government for not doing justice in distribution of aid among the seven Afghan parties. Many Pakistanis believe Mojaddedi often complained Washington against Pakistan during war against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. His recent letter has sparked strong criticism from both Pakistan and Afghan circles.

In his letter Mojaddedi has pinpointed presence of 5000 Pakistani and Arabs fighting in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has already denied it. Taliban government has also contradicted that any foreigner has joined Taliban forces.

Taliban embassy in Pakistan has sharply reacted to Mojaddedi's propaganda that Pakistan has joined the attacks against Northern Opposition. Taliban embassy issued a statement saying that no foreigner is included in Taliban army.

"Afghans believe Mojaddedi has

nothing to do with the Afghan national affairs and hence they give no importance to his baseless and concocted statement", the embassy said.

In fact Mojaddedi's letter hurt the sentiments of both Afghans and Pakistanis. He had the right to express his opinion and send many letters to Nawaz Sharif. But what made objectionable was distribution of the text of the letter to the US and Western media for propaganda purpose to malign Pakistan where Mojaddedi is enjoying all facilities even more than Pakistanis.

An Afghan said "Pakistanis or Arabs fighting shoulder to shoulder with Taliban have no official status. They are fighting since Soviet troops occupied Afghanistan. They are affiliated with almost all the Jehadi Afghan parties. They are volunteers of Islam. Some are with Hikmatyar. Others are with Rabbani, yet others are with Ahmad Shah Masood, Mohammadi, Sayyaf and even with Mojaddedi. If they are seen participating in battles they are not officially or unofficially by the Government of Pakistan.

"Even if these Pakistanis and Arabs leave Afghanistan will fighting stop?, Mojaddedi asked.

Mujaddedi leaves for Denmark for unspecified reason

From Miangul Naeem

PESHAWAR - Former Afghan President and Chief of Afghan National Liberation Front (ANLF), Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, left Islamabad on Saturday for Denmark by flight No: PK739 at 11:15 a.m for unspecified reasons.

His departure came, at the helm of his renewed outburst against the increasing interference from neighboring countries in the affairs of Afghanistan. ANLF Director for Foreign Relation Humayoon Shinwari, however, said it is Majaddadi's routine visit to Denmark which he added was scheduled almost two weeks back.

Speculations are, however, that the former Afghan President was forced to leave Pakistan in the wake of his letter to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif wherein the earlier showed his concern over the reported presence of Pakistan Army in Afghanistan. This move put Pakistan in embarrassing situation on international level.

On Thursday, Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz, had a half-an-hour talks with the Afghan leader on telephone at his Peshawar residence. Sartaj Aziz had flatly denied the presence of Pak Army in Afghanistan in his interview to BBC. The same night he proceeded to Islamabad. And the very next day high level Pakistan officials met him at his Islamabad residence.

"It was just a routine meeting," Humayoon Shinwari said and quashed the speculations that Pakistan has exerted pressure on Sibghatullah Mujaddedi to leave its soil. "We have always considered Pakistan our second country. And the telephone call of Mr. Sartaj Aziz and subsequent meeting with Pakistani officials were just routine events", he argued.

He, however, did not elaborate the purpose of Mujaddedi's visit to Denmark. "He often goes to Denmark for his medical check-up", the ANLF Director mentioned.

NATION

05 AUG 1999

Pak army, Osama militants accused of supporting Taliban

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – Ittehad Islami of Prof. Abdul Rab Rasool Sayaf is the second Jihad group which accused Pakistan's armed forces and militant supporters of Arab national Osama bin Laden of supporting Taliban in the current fighting in north of Kabul.

Earlier, Afghan National Liberation Front (ANLF) Chief and former Afghan President Prof. Sibghatullah Mujaddedi was the first one who made such allegations against Pakistan through a letter addressed to Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif.

Engineer Torkyalay, an activist of Ittehad Islami (Sayaf) who introduced himself as a spokesman of the Northern Alliance at Peshawar, through a Press statement, alleged that the Taliban with the help of militarymen of Pakistan and supporters of Osama bin Laden captured Bagram, Nijrab, Tagab, Charikar and other areas. He also alleged that Pakistan's aircrafts have also contributed in the current fighting. He added that after six days fighting on the orders of Ahmad Shah Masud, the Northern Alliance troops vacated Ka-

pisa and Parwan provinces.

He further said that identity of all these foreigners supporting Taliban in their fighting have been confirmed. Elaborating his point of view, Engineer Torkyalay said that some of them are victims in the fighting while a large number have been arrested. He said that 121 out of these Pakistani army men were sent from Cherat and 11 of them have been killed in the fighting. They included Zafarul Haq, Sanaullah from Swat, Akbar from Multan, Ali Haidar from Swat, Kefayat from Lakki Marwat, Salim from Kohat, Izazullah Nowshetra, Alam Shah from Multan and Zia from Batagram.

As there is no further fighting but the Northern Alliance has been occupying the Salang Tunnel. He added that Taliban have made several attacks against Salang tunnel but it were repulsed. He, however, confessed fall of Sher Khan Bandar to Taliban in Kanduz province along with the Imam Sahib district. He apprehended that Taliban are likely to initiate further attacks against Salang Tunnel and the fighting in north of Kabul could be further prolonged.

NATION 06 AUG 1999

Security Council condemns Taliban

DAWN 06 AUG 1999

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 5: The UN Security Council on Thursday condemned the Taliban militia's latest offensive in Afghanistan against the last bastion of opposition in the north of the country.

"Members of the Council condemn the Taliban for the launching of the large-scale military offensive in the recent days," said a statement read by Council president Martin Andjaba of Namibia.

In their closed-door meeting here, Council members "demanded that the Taliban stop the offensive immediately and resume political

negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations," Mr Andjaba said.

"Members of the Council expressed their concern at reports of massive military assistance in support of above-mentioned offensive," Andjaba said. "They call for the immediate end of all external interference."

"To our dismay, the international community, throughout this period, with regards to the cessation of foreign aggression in Afghanistan, did not resort to any beneficial or constructive measures."—AFP

DAWN 01 AUG 1999

UN not to recognize Taliban: Brahimi

TEHRAN, July 31: UN special envoy for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi has said that Taliban would continue to face the problem of non-recognition by the international community even if they capture the entire Afghan territory through military means, Radio Tehran reported on Saturday.

In an interview with IRNA, the UN envoy expressed deep concern over the heavy offensive by the

Taliban against the United Front. He said Taliban have provoked the anger of the global and regional countries by not abiding to the peace accords particularly the latest agreement in the meeting of six plus two group in Tashkent.

The United Nations, he said, has suspended its aid supply programmes to different parts of Afghanistan due to escalation in war.—NNI

Neighbours urged to remain neutral Annan fears Afghan conflict may escalate

DAWN 08 AUG 1999

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 7: UN Secretary General Kofi Annan appealed on Friday to the six countries bordering Afghanistan to honour a pledge to keep out of the civil war, lest it become a "trans-national conflict".

"Even as a purely internal conflict, the Afghan crisis is a clear menace to regional peace and stability," Annan said in a statement through his spokesman.

He said he was disturbed by reports "that there are now thousands of non-Afghan nationals taking part in the fighting" between the Taliban and its opponents.

Annan also criticized the belligerents for "cynically" trying to

exploit the UN by forcing civilians to flee their homes, then asking for humanitarian aid.

"The parties responsible for such disasters cannot, cynically, commit such criminal acts, then turn to the UN and the international community as a whole to help save their own people from disasters provoked by those who claim to be the country's leaders," he said.

Annan recalled that Afghanistan's neighbours had signed a joint declaration last month in which they "agreed not to provide military support to any Afghan party and to prevent the use of our territories for such purposes."—AFP

Annan calls for end to fighting in Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS (NNI) — As tens of thousands of people fled the latest bout of fighting in Afghanistan, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has called upon

the warring factions to stop their "senseless self-destruction" and resume serious negotiations under the auspices of the world body.

In a statement issued by his spokesman here, Annan said the changing fortunes of the parties on the battlefield "vividly illustrate that the Afghan conflict can never be resolved through force and the gain or loss of territory will not bring peace."

"It demonstrates anew that the conflict will end only through a peaceful dialogue which would lead to national reconciliation and the formation of a genuinely representative government acceptable to all Afghans," he said.

"This fundamental truth has been reaffirmed one more time at the recent meeting of the 'Six-plus-Two' group in Tashkent.

Annan described as "alarming" reports of massive forced displacement of civilians and said UN personnel and others were trying to ascertain those responsible for the human rights violations. The U.N. staff was also assessing the needs of people affected by the fighting and was prepared to provide whatever help was available, he said. "But the parties responsible for such disasters cannot, cynically commit such criminal acts and then turn to the UN and the international community as a whole to help save their own people from disasters provoked by those who claim to be their country's leaders," he said.

NATION
08 AUG 1999

Madaris role in backing Taliban worries UN

DAWN

21 AUG 1999

ISLAMABAD, Aug 20: The United Nations on Friday voiced concern over the growing recruitment of students from seminaries in its war against the country's beleaguered opposition alliance.

"The process has been going on for some time and we are worried it is increasing," said Louis-Georges Arsenault, UNICEF representative for Afghanistan in Islamabad.

He could not give an exact figure on how many students had joined the Afghan civil war on the side of the pro-Pakistan Taliban.

"The number is in thousands, and a big number among the fresh draftees is under the age of 18," Arsenault told German Press Agency dpa in an interview.

He said the trend was of great concern and that was why the world body was appealing to all the Afghan factions to refrain from recruiting young fighters for any of the fronts.

Early last week, some 2,000 Afghan youngsters, currently learning at one of pro-Taliban schools in Akora Khattak, some 120 kilometres northwest of Islamabad, were dispatched to Afghanistan to join the Taliban forces north of capital Kabul.

However, Pakistani press reports suggested that the majority of seminaries in the northwestern frontier area had been closed to allow the "young Taliban", mostly Afghans, to join the fighting in the war-ravaged country.

Pakistani border authorities last week detained some 20 "Pakistani Taliban" to keep them from crossing into Afghanistan.

A Taliban delegation recently visited northwestern Pakistan to persuade the students to take part in the jihad in Afghanistan.

FIGHTING: Fierce fighting raged on Friday between Taliban militia and forces loyal to Ahmed Shah Masood in the country's east.

Troops were fighting in Laghman province for the control of the strategic Daulat Shah district, the Afghan Islamic Press reported.

The Pakistan-based private news service said Taliban forces have launched a large-scale offensive to capture the district, still in the hands of Masood's troops.

The report said ten soldiers were killed there and more than a dozen injured in the past two days.

The Taliban's information minister, Amir Khan Mutaqqai, meanwhile claimed that the militia - which rules more than two-thirds of the country - had repulsed attacks in the eastern Nangarhar and Kunar provinces.

"The entire provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar are now controlled by Taliban and we are facing no problems in these areas," he told AIP.—dpa

UN condemns Taliban for HR violations

By Our Correspondent

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 18: The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Tuesday strongly condemned the Taliban for its "forced displacement of civilians in Afghanistan as a result of a recent offensive against the opposition northern alliance".

Annan also expressed deep concern over reports that students some as young as 14 years were involved in the fighting calling upon the warring parties in the conflict to respect Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In a statement issued here by his spokesman Mr Annan said he was alarmed and deeply distressed by reports of widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law against inhabitants of the Shomali Plain and displaced people in the capital, Kabul.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) around 10,000 people arrived in Kabul on foot over the weekend, after trekking by foot from the Shomali plain and Panjsher valley north of the city. Another 9,000 reportedly arrived in the city on Monday.

He urged the parties to immediately end the conflict and ensure the protection of civilians.

The Secretary-General also called on the warring parties to ensure the safe and free movement of relief workers who, he said, remain committed to providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of the conflict. However, he noted, the primary responsibility for the welfare of the Afghan civilians rested with those who have displaced them from their homes.

DAWN

19 AUG 1999

NATION

29 AUG 1999

UN doubts relevance of Afghan mediation group

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) - UN officials cast doubt Friday on peace efforts involving Afghanistan's six neighbour countries and urged the international community to come up with fresh ideas to halt the fighting.

'The political situation is a stalemate,' Kieran Prendergast, under secretary general for political affairs, told the Security Council.

It was, he added, 'extremely perplexing that outside support for the warring parties has not diminished' since the so-called six-plus-two group met on July 20 and pledged to keep out of the Afghan war.

'The apparent trend of growing disunity among the members of the six-plus-two can be expected to further call into question the relevance of that group as presently constituted,' Prendergast told the Council during an open debate.

The six-plus-two includes Pakistan, which recognises the Taliban movement, and Iran, which is hostile to the Taliban. Other members are Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — former Soviet central Asian republics to the north of Afghanistan — and China, which has a small border with it in the Himalayas. Russia and the United States are the other two members of the group.

Pakistan has dismissed allegations of military support to the Taliban as 'ma-

licious and baseless.' But Afghanistan's opposition has denounced Islamabad for its 'flagrant involvement.'

'We believe that the short-cut to peace in Afghanistan is cessation of Pakistani aid to the Taliban and despatch of reinforcements of troops and volunteers to our country,' Abdullah told AFP on Tuesday.

'The six-plus-two were originally assembled almost two years ago with a view to adopting as joint strategy vis-a-vis a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict,' Prendergast said.

'This has not happened. A new formula of member states' support for the peace-making efforts of the Secretary General and his special envoy may be required.'

On August 6, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan appealed to the six to honour their pledge 'not to provide military support to any Afghan party and to prevent the use of our territories for such purposes.' He said he was disturbed by reports 'that there are now thousands of non-Afghan nationals taking part in the fighting between the Islamic Taliban militia and its opponents.'

Prendergast said the UN estimated that 1,200 Taliban fighters and 600 members of the United Front under the command of Ahmad Shah Masood had been killed in the past month.

UN chides Taliban: recruitment

By Richard Galpin

ISLAMABAD: The United Nations appealed on Friday to the Taliban militia and opposition forces in Afghanistan to stop recruiting child soldiers to fight in the long-running civil war.

The UN children's fund, Unicef, believes that thousands of children — some as young as 14 — are fighting on the opposing sides.

Although unable to supply specific figures, the UN is in no doubt that the problem is now much worse than in the past.

'It's on the increase and that's why we are worried,' said Louis-Georges Arsenault, the Unicef representative for Afghanistan. 'The fighting is intensifying, and therefore there are more fighters being recruited and there are more, under the age of 18.'

The United Nations fears have been heightened by a huge recruitment drive by the Taliban in the madrassahs of a neighbouring country.

This month a Taliban delegation

visited all the main madrassahs of that particular country and read out a message from the militia's supreme leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, appealing to the students to join the Taliban's holy war.

It is estimated that up to 5,000 students left their schools, where many of them receive military training, and crossed the border. Some schools closed down to enable their students to sign up.—

Dawn/Guardian News Service

DAWN

22 AUG 1999

Afghanistan UN unhappy over foreign meddling

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 28: A senior UN official told the Security Council on Friday that foreign meddling was keeping Afghanistan's brutal civil war going and accused the ruling Taliban of forcing 70,000 people from their homes.

Foreign countries were delivering war materials to all sides and sending combatants, including young boys, to participate in the fighting, Kieran Prendergast, the UN under-secretary-general for political affairs, said.

"If this is not reversed by the warring Afghan parties and their outside supporters, the nature of the senseless war in Afghanistan will increasingly evolve towards an even more widespread and destructive regional conflict," he said.

Prendergast's remarks opened a day-long council debate and review of Afghanistan. The country's Taliban rulers in late July began a major offensive to crush the forces of Ahmad Shah Masood, their last obstacle to control of the entire country.

Abdullah Abdullah, vice minister for foreign affairs in the UN-recognised government the Taliban overthrew, accused Pakistan of "state-sponsored terrorism."

And in a separate news conference a Taliban official, Abdul Hakim Mujahid, said the 15-member Security Council "prompted by the evil intentions" of Russia want-

ed to impose sanctions on the Taliban and ignored crimes of the opposition.

Pakistan said young fighters crossing the border were Afghans and not Pakistanis. Ambassador Inamul Haque said it was foolish for the United Nations to continue recognising the ousted Afghan government while the Taliban controlled 90 per cent of the country.

Haque said moves toward sanctions were wrong but voiced support for Chinese suggestions for an arms embargo on all parties. "It is through engagement and not isolation that the international community can hope to bring peace," he said.

Prendergast, who said fighting in the Bangi district was still continuing, said Masood had indicated willingness to negotiate, including talks furthered by Pakistan. But the Taliban had not consented yet, he said.

Prendergast, however, stressed that the "unabated involvement" of foreign countries made a mockery of peace declarations by those same countries.

He was referring to negotiations in the "six plus two" group comprised of Afghanistan's six neighbours — China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — as well as the United States and Russia.—Reuters

Pakistan team to hold talks with Taliban today

21 AUG 1999

NATION

ISLAMABAD (NNI) — Pakistani negotiating team, shuttling between the ruling Taliban and the opposition alliance for peaceful settlement of Afghan crisis, will visit Kandahar today (Saturday) for talks with Taliban leaders, Afghan and official sources said Friday.

The Pakistani delegation, led by Secretary Interior Rustam Shah Mohmand, will hold talks with Taliban supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar, the sources said.

The delegation will include Pakistan's Ambassador in Kabul Aziz Ahmed Khan, Acting Director General, Afghanistan, Ayaz Wazir, and some other senior officials.

The same Pakistani team met with a four-member Afghan opposition delegation in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. Younis Qanooni, close aide to Commander Ahmed Shah Masood, led the opposition's delegation. Other members of the delegation included General Hussain Anwari, General Abdullah Wardak and Abbas Karimi.

"The Pakistani delegation will apprise the Taliban leader of its talks with the opposition alliance in Dushanbe and will also discuss with them ways to find out a negotiated settlement of the crisis," the sources said.

They said members of the Pakistan delegation are likely to proceed again to Tajikistan for second round of talks with the opposition alliance.

The sources dismissed as baseless reports that the Afghan opposition declined meeting with Pakistani delegation. "The Pakistani team held wide-ranging talks with a high-level opposition team and discussed a couple of proposals for the peaceful settlement of the Afghan turmoil," the sources said. They described the talks between Pakistani officials and Afghan opposition as positive.

This was the first face-to-face contact between Pakistan and the opposition alliance in almost three years. The Afghan opposition accuses Pakistan of backing Taliban, the charges always denied by Islamabad.

The Afghan opposition alliance Thursday described Pakistan's latest peace efforts as "insincere given its overt support of the Taliban and its interference in Afghanistan".

"The United Front questions Pakistan's impartiality given its deceitful and recalcitrant role to date in ending the Afghan imbroglio," General Sayed Husain Anwari, Chief Military Commander of opposition Harakat-e-Islami, said.

In a statement Anwari said the United Front will not accept its role as an honest broker as long as its government continues supporting the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. He said the Afghan opposition is determined to sue for peace and to reconcile its differences with the Taliban under the auspices of the "six-plus two" group of nations.

Sami lashes out at Northern Alliance

By Sadaqat Jan

ISLAMABAD — Chief of his own faction of Jamiat Ulma-e-Islam (Samiul Haq Group) Maulana Samiul Haq Friday lashed out at Afghanistan's opposition Northern Alliance for rejecting Pakistan's fresh bids to mediate peace for its war-torn western neighbour.

Samiul Haq said, "they (the Northern Alliance) are neither interested in talks nor in peace for Afghanistan."

"A dialogue with them is not a solution of the Afghan problem," he said talking to a group of Islamabad-based journalists at his Akora Khattak residence.

A two-member Pakistani delegation held talks in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe, with Younas Qanooni, a close aide of Afghan opposition commander Ahmed Shah Masood, on Thursday, as part of Pakistan's "renewed" efforts for peace in Afghanistan.

But, according to reports, Qanooni spurned Pakistan's initiative saying "mediator is a neutral and impartial person and they (Pakistan) are at war against us."

The Afghan opposition accuses Pa-

kistan, which recognises Taliban as Afghanistan's rulers, of meddling in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, a charge Islamabad denies.

Maulana Samiul Haq, patron-in-chief of Darululum Haqqania which has thrown up almost all of top Taliban leadership, said Younis Qanooni was a mere "fugitive" and has no status for negotiations to be held with him.

He said even if Taliban withdrew from Afghanistan there would be no peace in that country. The seven or eight opposition groups will then tear away any hopes of peace in Afghanistan, Haq said. He advised Pakistan to fully back Taliban as they were the only people who could protect its interests.

"With the grace of Allah" the spirit of Jihad (holy Muslim war) has been revived in Dagestan, Samiul Haq said, commenting on the uprising in Caucasus republic.

"The wave of Jihad has reached there and nobody is going to stop it," he said.

"Dagestan was a centre of Islam and Imam Shamil had waged Jihad there centuries before."

He expressed satisfaction that "with the grace of God Shariat (Islamic laws) has been imposed in Chechnia."

NATION

21 AUG 1999

US contacts Taliban on Osama extradition

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The United States is negotiating with Taliban on sending Osama bin Laden to stand trial in a third country, NBC News reported on its website Saturday.

Quoting a senior US official, NBC said Washington hoped to convince the Taliban to send Osama to either Egypt or Saudi Arabia to answer charges that he masterminded the bombings of two US embassies in Africa a year ago.

Abdul Hakeem Mujahid, the Taliban's UN representative, told NBC News the United States had asked that Osama be deported.

'If Osama bin Laden himself wants to go to any other country, we will support the idea and even facilitate his departure to any other country,' Mujahid said.

But if Osama were to leave the shelter of the Taliban, which controls 80 per cent of Afghanistan, it is unlikely he would go to Egypt — where he has been linked to a plot to kill President Hosni Mubarak — or Saudi Arabia — where he is suspected of involvement in a bomb attack that killed five US servicemen, reported NBC.

The United States has posted a five-million-dollar reward for information leading to the arrest of Osama, accusing him of being behind the twin bombings of US embassies in Africa in August 1998.

More than 250 people died in those attacks.

In July, Washington, which does not officially recognise the Taliban, imposed economic sanctions against Afghanistan for harbouring Osama.

By July 30, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported that Osama had agreed to leave the country.

The Saudi Arabian millionaire was looking for asylum in another country, said the agency, which operates from Peshawar in Pakistan. It did not name which countries he had approached.

Although Osama's stay in Afghanistan had become increasingly difficult because of the danger of a US attack and the militia's curtailment of his activities, the Taliban 'will never oust him forcibly,' AIP quoted one source as saying.

More Afghan women to be allowed in US

By Our Staff Correspondent

WASHINGTON, Aug 12: The US has doubled the year-2000 quota for refugees from South Asia, from 4,000 to 8,000, specially for women from Afghanistan, a senior State Department official has announced.

Julia Taft, assistant secretary of state for population, refugees, and migration, made the announcement before the Sub-committee on Immigration of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"We expect our earmarked assistance for Afghans to reach nearly \$10 million this year, while general regional contributions to the UNHCR and ICRC also benefit Afghans significantly," she said.

"We have seen a sizable increase in the numbers of Afghan women at risk. As President Clinton has made clear, we are deeply opposed to the Taliban regime's repressive policies toward women and we are committed to ensuring that Afghan women in vulnerable circumstances obtain the protection they deserve," Taft said making a liberal admissions policy for the Afghan women.

"In order to accommodate the anticipated surge in referrals, we are proposing to double this regional ceiling in 2000 to 8,000," she said.

"We are also pursuing the 'up to standard' initiative with Afghan refugees, with a special focus on educational opportunities for refugee women and girls in Pakistan.

Taft said US has now doubled the

assistance for Afghan refugees. "When it looked a few years ago as if peace might come to Afghanistan, repatriation was robust and international aid to refugees began to be downsized. Now, with genuine peace still elusive in Afghanistan and the patience of the refugee-hosting nations wearing thin as the decade closes, we have redoubled rather than phased out our assistance."

"Additionally, the administration is recommending an admissions ceiling of 80,000 refugees for FY 2000, she said, but added that if Congress approves less than \$660 million for this programme — Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) — "we will be forced to cut the number of admissions."

Out of the 80,000 admissions, about 17,000 slots would be reserved for non-Kosovo crisis refugees from the former Yugoslavia, which "would address the ongoing need for Bosnian resettlement," she said.

Taft also outlined refugee admissions proposed for Africa and the Near East/South Asia, as well as special programmes for refugees from Cuba, Vietnam and the former Soviet Union, all of which show declining admissions.

She said US support of UNHCR in the Near East/South Asia region had greatly expanded their work in individual status determinations and, as a result, referrals for resettlement.

NATION

16 AUG 1999

DAWN

13 AUG 1999

US officials in regular contact with Taliban

By Umer Farooq

ISLAMABAD - United States officials have been in regular contact with the Taliban representatives on the issues of Osama bin Laden and countering international terrorism, however, no formal talks between the two have been held, a US embassy official said on Tuesday.

"We have been in regular contact with the Taliban representatives in Islamabad, New York and Washington, but I am not aware of any formal talks with the Taliban," said the official. The US Administration doesn't recognise Taliban Administration.

The official said that the US maintained regular "informal contact" with all the Afghan factions including Taliban to discuss the issues of Osama bin Laden, countering international terrorism and finding solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. "There have been no formal talks between the US and Taliban, the contact is informal in nature in which they express their views and we express our's," said the official of the US Embassy.

Recently, the NBC television telecast a report quoting Taliban's representative to UN Abdul Hakeem Mujahid that US officials were trying to convince Taliban to deport Osama bin Laden. It was, perhaps, during, one of such informal contacts that the US officials proposed the extradition of Osama to a third country.

The US embassy official told *The Nation* that the Taliban and the US officials meet with no fixed agenda.

"However, in our informal contacts with the Taliban representatives we dis-

cuss three issues including Osama bin Laden, countering international terrorism and finding solutions to the present conflict in Afghanistan," said the US official.

The official, however, ruled out the possibility of US recognition of Taliban Administration as a legitimate government of Afghanistan. "We can only recognise a broad-based government in Afghanistan formed in accordance with the principles agreed in the meeting of Six plus Two Group," said the US official.

NATION

18 AUG 1999

Iran wants UN intervention in Afghanistan

TEHRAN, Aug 4: Iran called on Wednesday for UN intervention to stop the bloody civil war in Afghanistan and denounced foreign interference in the region.

In a phone conversation with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi underlined the need for a "political solution rather than military actions," the official IRNA news agency said.

Kharazi called on Annan to "use his influence to put an end to the mass killings" and criticized "interference by foreign forces in Afghanistan," IRNA said.

TALIBAN FORCING EXODUS: Afghanistan's opposition alliance accused the Taliban movement on Wednesday of forcing a civilian exodus from the newly-captured Shomali plains north of Kabul.

"We have reports that the Taliban are forcing people out of Shomali," opposition spokesman Dr Abdullah told reporters by telephone from London. "Those who stay are exposed to all types of atrocities like murder and imprisonment."

Abdullah spoke as the Taliban pushed further into the opposition territory and captured Gulbahar, the second most important opposition stronghold after the Panjsher valley.

The militia reached the Salang pass, which divides the north and south of Afghanistan.

Residents of the strategic Shomali valley are mostly ethnic

Tajik like Masood, while the Taliban draws its forces mainly from the majority Pashtun ethnic group.

"This is mostly directed at Tajiks of the region," Abdullah said of the alleged Taliban eviction drive. "Some 300,000 people have left fearing Taliban's savagery."

On Tuesday, Abdullah said about 250,000 civilians of the area had sought refuge further north in the Panjsher valley.

An estimated 10,000 women, children and elderly men from the Shomali have converged on the Taliban-held Kabul for shelter.

Most of the refugees arriving in Kabul were from Charikar town, which fell to the Taliban on Monday. Walking the 60-km route to Kabul, they looked exhausted.

Aid agencies were discussing with the Taliban arrangements to

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settle the refugees in Kabul, where 400,000 people already live on international assistance, agency sources said.

His statement followed a warning by Amnesty International last week that thousands of civilians were at risk in the Taliban drive to crush Masood. "Taliban and anti-Taliban forces have committed gross human rights abuses against civilians in the past," Amnesty said. "What guarantees are there they will spare civilians this time?" — AFP/Reuters

Iran urges Taliban to learn lesson of failed offensive

TEHRAN, Aug 6: The shortlived success of the Taliban's summer offensive should prove once and for all that there is no military solution to Afghanistan's protracted civil war, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi said on Friday.

"The experience of the past few days of fighting in Afghanistan which has brought about nothing but bloodshed, homelessness and devastation should have provided sufficient evidence for the Taliban and Pakistan that the current crisis in Afghanistan has no military solution," Kharazi told IRNA.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran invites the Taliban and the anti-Taliban forces in northern Afghanistan to implement the agreements reached in the Tashkent Six-plus-Two meeting and to start their discussions as soon as possible," Kharazi said.—AFP

DAWN

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DAWN

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Tehran asks UN for arrest of Taliban who killed its diplomats

TEHRAN (AFP) - Iranian President Mohammad Khatami met Saturday with the families of nine Iranians slain a year ago by Afghanistan's Taliban militia as Tehran launched a fresh appeal to the United Nations to have the killers brought to justice.

Iran also announced there would be a memorial service to mark the first anniversary of the killings Sunday amid repeated calls for the Taliban and the opposition Northern Alliance to negotiate an end to the protracted Afghan civil war.

The official IRNA news agency said Khatami met with family members of the eight diplomats and one IRNA journalist killed when the Taliban seized the northern Afghan town of Mazar-i-Sharif last August 8.

It did not give further details on the meeting but Khatami was reportedly due to update the families on the foreign ministry's efforts to see the killers captured and brought to trial.

IRNA said the ministry sent a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Friday stressing its determination to pursue the incident, which led Tehran to mass tens of thousands of troops along the Afghan border last year.

Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi also met with the families on Thursday, saying afterward that Iran 'is still awaiting the identification and punishment of those responsible'. 'We will not rest until we get answers,' he said.

The English-language *Tehran Times* reported there would be a memorial service for the slain men at a central Tehran mosque on Sunday.

The Taliban, who control 80 percent of Afghanistan and are in the midst of a bloody war to oust Iran-backed opposition forces from their remaining strongholds in the north, have never admitted to the killings.

Iran has repeatedly said it will not normalize relations with the Taliban until the killers

are brought to trial.

The government of the Islamic militia, who ousted President Burhanuddin Rabbani in 1996, is recognised only by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as well as Pakistan, which Tehran accuses of backing the Taliban. Pakistan has denied any formal involvement in the Afghan conflict.

Journalists from the official Iranian press who were on hand when the Taliban launched a fresh offensive July 27 against opposition troops loyal to commander Ahmad Shah Massoud said Pakistani soldiers were fighting with the Islamic militia.

The new offensive came just days after the so-called Six-plus-Two group, which comprises Afghanistan's six neighbours and Russia and the United States, brokered peace talks in Tashkent at which the warring sides agreed to hold further discussions on a ceasefire. During the offensive the Taliban captured a string of towns northeast of Kabul before the opposition recaptured the territory in a lightning counter-offensive.

The English-language *Iran News* said Saturday it was 'high time' that the Taliban 'realised the futility of military options'. But reports on Saturday said the Taliban were shoring up their defences around the capital as Massoud's Northern Alliance troops closed in around districts northeast of Kabul.

Up to 140,000 people have fled the latest fighting, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said Friday.

Since the offensive Tehran has stepped up calls for both sides to come to the negotiating table.

The experience of the past few days of fighting in Afghanistan, which has brought about nothing but bloodshed, homelessness and devastation should have provided sufficient evidence for the Taliban and Pakistan that the current crisis in Afghanistan has no



TEHRAN: Iranian President Mohammad Khatami meets with the children of nine Iranians slain a year ago in Afghanistan when Taliban seized the northern Afghan town of Mazar-i-Sharif. —AFP

military solution,' Kharazi said Friday. 'Iran is ready to help the process and calls on the Pakistani government to do its best to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table and stop the bloodshed,' he said.

Annan on Friday appealed to the six countries bordering Afghanistan to honour a pledge to keep out of the civil war, lest it become a 'trans-national conflict.'

'Even as a purely internal conflict, the Afghan crisis is a clear menace to regional peace and stability,' he said in a statement.

Tehran calls on UN to halt war in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (AFP) - Iran called on Wednesday for UN intervention to stop the bloody civil war in Afghanistan and denounced foreign interference in the region.

In a phone conversation with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi underlined the need for a 'political solution rather than military actions,' the official IRNA news agency said.

Kharazi called on Annan to 'use his influence to put an end to the mass killings' and criticised 'interference by foreign forces in Afghanistan,' IRNA said.

Afghanistan's Islamic Taliban militia, which controls 80 percent of the country, has mounted a fresh offensive in recent weeks to oust the remaining opposition troops in the north under the command of Ahmad Shah Masood.

Iran has had strained relations with the Taliban since the murder of several Iranian diplomats and a journalist dur-

ing the Taliban's capture of the northern Afghan town of Mazar-i-Sharif last year. But a Taliban official said two weeks ago the militia were ready for fence-mending talks with Tehran.

Killing of diplomats

Iran lodges complaint against Taliban

By Our Correspondent

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 11: Iran on Tuesday lodged a complaint against the Taliban government in Afghanistan for not investigating the killing of eight Iranian diplomats and journalist in the Iranian consulate at Mazar-i-Sharif last year.

On the first death anniversary of its diplomats Iran's Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi asked the secretary general of the United Nations to look into the matter urgently.

The spokesman for the Secretary General Fred Eckhard acknowledged that Mr Kofi Annan has been informed by the foreign minister of Iran that the Taliban Movement in Afghanistan has not made substantial progress in its investigation into last year's murder of eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist in the Iranian Consulate General in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Spokesman Fred Eckhard told reporters at UN headquarters in New York that the secretary general had received a letter from Dr Kamal Kharazi on the occasion of the first anniversary of the incident.

Mr Eckhard said that the secretary general's special envoy and the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNISMA) had repeatedly reminded the Taliban

of the resolutions and declarations adopted by the General Assembly, the Security Council and the "six plus-two" informal group calling on the Taliban to carry out a serious and speedy investigation into that very grave incident. The issue was again raised by the special envoy when he visited Kabul last month.

"It should be recalled that during the same period thousands of Afghans, most of them civilians, were killed in Northern Afghanistan, including thousands of Taliban fighters in Mazar-i-Sharif in May 1997," Mr Eckhard said.

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has commissioned an independent investigation of these mass killings of 1997 and 1998 and the report will be submitted to the High Commissioner in the near future, said the spokesman.

Meanwhile, the UN refugee agency reported on Tuesday that civilians were still moving into Afghanistan's capital of Kabul after the latest round of fighting.

The UNHCR said the people who were trucked to Kabul and Jalalabad last week by the Taliban are now nearly all in Kabul and most of them seem to have dispersed to the northwestern part of the city.

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ICRC to assist displaced persons in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (NNI) — The spokesman of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Kabul, Christopher Lodhi has said that the Committee has resumed flights to Kabul and is now assisting the war wounded and refugees.

In an interview with the VOA, Christopher said he did not know the exact figure of the wounded of the war but said he can just say that few hundreds of injured are being treated in the centers being assisted by the Red Cross. He said the ICRC is supporting hospitals in Kabul, Shamali plain and Panjsher valley.

He said during the war, they were monitoring the situation at hospitals and providing additional assistance to some hospitals for the treatment of those wounded in war. He added that the ICRC is not facing the problem of shortage of medicines and at present, it does have adequate medicines to assist the hospitals. Talking about the refugees and displaced persons of Shamali, Christopher said that obviously civilians have left Shamali due to fighting and part of them have moved to the north, to the Panjsher and others are arriving in Kabul.

The ICRC, he said is observing the situation to know as to finally where do the people go. "We also monitor the situation to know as to what are the needs of these people", he said. He added that the present, it is very difficult to say as to how many people have been displaced but the ICRC officials are monitoring movement of the people and would try to extend help and assistance to them in Kabul and other areas as well if need be. He said that they would also keep in mind as to how possible it is to reach the other area from logistic point of view.

He said that Taliban have demanded help and assistance to these refugees. He said that Taliban informed them in a meeting in Ministry of Planning in Kabul today that a number of displaced are arriving in Kabul and requested the ICRC to extend them help and assistance if need be. Christopher said that they pledged with them for the aid. He added that they have an office in Panjsher as well as the ICRC officials are in touch with their officials to discuss the issue of the refugees. He said the ICRC resumed its flights to Kabul after getting peace guarantee.

OIC asks Afghan groups to cease fire

RIYADH, Aug 8: The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) called on the warring parties in Afghanistan on Sunday to stop fighting and return to the negotiating table under the auspices of the United Nations.

The OIC is "following the current developments with great concern" and deplored the "heavy human and material losses suffered by the Afghan people," it said in a statement issued in the Red Sea city of Jeddah, where it is based.

"The Organisation of the Islamic Conference calls on various Afghan parties to listen to reason and return to the negotiating tables under the auspices of the United Nations, with the participation of all the parties concerned in the Afghan question," it said.

"Bitter experience ... has clearly shown that the Afghan problem cannot be settled by arms," said the organisation, whose 55 member states make it the world's largest Muslim organisation.

The hardline Taliban, which control 80 per cent of Afghanistan, launched its summer offensive at the end of July against the resistance forces of General Ahmad, Shah Masood, the last military leader to hold out against them.

After a five-year civil war, the Taliban is attempting to capture the northeast provinces held by Masood.

The UN Security Council on Thursday called on the Taliban to halt their offensive and return to talks.—AFP

NATION

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19 AUG 1999

Japan to assist Afghan NGOs

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, Aug 18: The embassy of Japan announced here on Wednesday the decision to provide financial support to Afghanistan through Grass Root Assistance scheme, amounting to Pakistan rupees 5,673,210 equivalent to US \$1,10,740.

This is going to be the first ever assistance granted to any NGO involved in relief and humanitarian activities in Afghanistan through Grass Root Assistance scheme.

Under these agreements, the government of Japan will extend grants to two non governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to assist them in the implementation of their projects in the fields of land mine clearance and rehabilitation of land mine victims.

According to a press release issued by embassy of Japan, a sign-

ing ceremony will be held to this effect at the embassy premises at 1100 hours on Thursday. The ambassador of Japan Mr Minoru Kubota will sign the agreements with the representatives of these NGOs.

Government of Japan has made more than 400 million US dollars equivalent contribution (21,360 million Pakistan rupees) to Afghanistan through United Nations Organization and other international organizations since 1979.

In addition to this assistance, the GRA scheme for Afghanistan has been launched this year to extend direct assistance to the people of Afghanistan through NGOs and local organizations to meet the various humanitarian needs in Afghanistan.

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28 AUG 1999

India snaps last air links with Afghanistan

NEW DELHI (AFP) - India has frozen commercial flights to Kabul, snapping the main lifeline for thousands of Afghans here who regularly travel back home to tend to family and business.

Afghan national carrier Ariana Airlines said Friday it had been ordered last week to halt its tri-weekly flights from the northern Indian city of Amritsar to Kabul. India attributed the suspension to 'operational reasons' and threw out the airline's appeal this week to operate three flights to ferry 50 tonnes of cargo, mostly medicines, held up in Amritsar, Ariana officials told AFP.

'We had appealed that as we are a commercial airline operating in India since 1956 we should be allowed to operate three ad hoc flights to clear the backlog but nothing has happened,' said Abdul Rahim, Ariana's chief representative in India. India halted daily Ariana flights from New Delhi to Kabul in October 1996 when the Taliban militia overthrew the government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani in Kabul.

Vajpayee criticizes Afghan 'massacre'

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: India's prime minister has condemned killings and torching of houses in an offensive by Afghanistan's Taliban movement and called on Pakistan to ceasing "interfering" in the conflict, a government statement claimed on Wednesday.

In a letter to deposed Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani,

Atal Behari Vajpayee "condemned the brutal massacre of innocent people, torching of houses...perpetrated by the Taliban forces backed by Pakistan on the people of Shomali plains in Afghanistan earlier this month," the statement claimed.

"It is our earnest desire that peace and stability be re-es-

ablished in Afghanistan," Vajpayee said in his letter to Rabbani.

"That will be possible only when Pakistan ceases its interference in Afghan affairs."

Rabbani has accused Pakistan of meddling in Afghanistan's affairs by allowing Pakistani religious recruits to fight alongside the militia.—Reuters

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Taliban from Mardan leave for Afghanistan

By Our Correspondent

MARDAN, Aug 4: A number of Taliban have left for Afghanistan in the wake of fresh fighting between Taliban and the Northern Alliance, led by Ahmad Shah Masood.

A survey showed that more than 1,000 Afghani Taliban were studying in 11 madressahs here and those who have completed their religious courses have left for Afghanistan.

The madressahs operating in the city are: Khairul Madaris, Madressah Faizul Islam, Madressah Anwarul Uloom, Madressah Anwari Mohammadia,

Taffhimul Quran, Tajweedul Quran, Madressah Qadria, Madressah Rahmania, Madressah Qiamia, Madressah Tahifzul Quran and Madressah Taqweetul Eeman.

Meanwhile, a large number of Taliban and their supporters have welcomed the interview of JUI chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman to BBC in which he had vowed to retaliate in the same manner if US launched any attack against Osama bin Ladin in Afghanistan.

They said Osama was a peaceful person who had not harmed any US interest anywhere in the world.

No interference in Afghanistan: Sartaj

ISLAMABAD (Agencies)—Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz Thursday denied that Pakistan soldiers were fighting in Afghanistan, terming all such reports false and misleading.

"Not a single soldier of Pakistan is in Afghanistan nor do we have any other kind of interference there. They (Taliban) have lot of weapons and all such reports are false and wrong," the Foreign Minister told BBC in an interview.

A number of countries have expressed their concern over ongoing fighting in Afghanistan. Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharzi has also expressed concern over the escalation of war and displacement of thousands of people in northern Afghanistan. He called for international effort for end to fighting in Afghanistan. Kharzi has met the UN Secretary General as well to discuss Afghan situation.

"These are totally false reports and rumours," Sartaj said when he was asked about reports that the Taliban's recent gains were Pakistan-backed.

Uzbekistan has also expressed concern and Russia has regretted increase in foreign interference in Afghanistan. Most of the countries point finger at Pakistan.

"We have no link with Taliban. People from our Madrassas used to go to Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This practice has not come to an end."

However, the Minister said the Pak-Afghan border was too long to man. "I cannot say that people from Pakistani organisations have not gone there because how can we prevent them when we have such a long border with Afghanistan. We have neither supported them nor we are making interference."

NATION

06 AUG 1999

Pakistan not involved in Afghanistan: Zafar

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD - Minister for Religious Affairs and Leader of the House in the Senate, Raja Mohammad Zafarul Haq ruled out on Friday Pakistan's involvement in the affairs of Afghanistan.

"Pakistan wants to leave the issue of Afghanistan to the people of that country," Raja Zafarul Haq said while responding to points of order in the Upper House raised by several opposition members.

The Opposition benches, particularly the ANP Senators lashed out at the government for its alleged interference in Afghanistan and arrest of ANP MNA and MPA.

He said Pakistan's image was damaged by certain individuals, claiming that they would send Mujahideen to Afghanistan or Kashmir. "In fact these individuals did not send even a single Mujahid to any area but only issue statements," he said.

He said that some tribesmen were living on both sides of the border and they

used to visit one another. The government, he said, is not involved in this affair, adding during the Soviet occupation Afghan tribesmen crossed the border and took shelter with their relatives on this side of the border.

Raja Zafarul Haq pointed out that the Prime Minister has strictly directed the Interior Ministry and other agencies to check any effort by any element to cross into Afghanistan. He emphasised that fifteen to twenty countries including India are interfering in Afghanistan, quoting an article of *Janes Defence* weekly.

He also assured the members that he would seek early release of ANP MNA and MPA held in Swabi on Thursday and that the matter would be taken up with the NWFP Chief Minister.

Bashir Ahmed Matta, Qazi Mohammad Anwar, Zahid Khan, Syed Aqil Shah, Dr Abdul Hayee Baloch, Syed Iqbal Haider, Shaikh Rafiq Ahmed and Aitzaz Ahsan pointed out the two issues.

NATION

14 AUG 1999

Pakistan renews efforts for Afghan peace

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, Aug 18: The government of Pakistan on Wednesday categorically stated that it was not interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who presided over the cabinet meeting, said that his government was not taking any "sides" in Afghanistan. Rather, he said, Pakistan was maintaining a neutral posture with a view to restoring peace in that country.

Pakistan's policy, he said, was in accordance with the Islamic principles of brotherhood, tolerance and based on removing differences through dialogue and negotiations.

"Pakistan's sincere efforts for peace were being appreciated by all sides," he said and added that his government was seeking an end to civil strife in Afghanistan in order to promote stability for the entire region.

Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz briefed the meeting about the latest situation in Afghanistan. He said that at the initiative of the prime minister fresh efforts were being made to have peace there.

He said a delegation, led by interior secretary Rustam Shah, including Pakistan ambassador in Kabul, Aziz Ahmad Khan, was currently in

Dushanbe for talks with the United Front. The United Front delegation was being led by Mr Younis Qanooni, a close aide of Ahmad Shah Masood.

The delegation was expected to return to Islamabad on Thursday.

The second phase of this initiative would be to brief the Taliban leadership about the details of the Dushanbe meeting. The Pakistan delegation would, accordingly, pro-

Another report on Back Page

ceeded to Kandahar on August 21 where they would be calling on the Taliban leader, Mulla Omar, Aziz said.

The cabinet, while expressing grief over the loss of lives and property due to the earthquake in Turkey, offered Fateha for those who had been killed in the tragedy.

The cabinet was informed that the government of Pakistan had sent two C-130 plane-load of relief goods, which included tents, blankets and medicines, to Turkey. A team of doctors and medical staff was also being sent to Turkey.

The prime minister directed the departments concerned to send all possible aid and assistance to Turkey.

DAWN

19 AUG 1999

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US freezes Afghan airline assets

WASHINGTON (NNI) — In an apparent bid to punish the Taliban for protecting Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, the US has resorted to drastic action against Afghanistan, freezing all the assets of its Ariana Airlines within American jurisdiction.

The US administration also barred all American entities or individuals from engaging in any business transactions with the Afghan carrier anywhere in the world.

The punitive action, announced by the White House, appears to be aimed at pressuring the Taliban regime into turning over bin Laden, accused of masterminding the bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, a year ago and of plotting fresh attacks on American citizens.

The action was taken under authority of a July executive order imposing sanctions on the Taliban, the Islamic militia which controls most of Afghanistan. The US is angry with the Taliban for its "continuing provision of safe haven" to bin Laden.

The action was taken against the regime for "allowing his (bin Laden's) terrorist organisation to operate training camps in territory under Taliban control" and "to use Afghanistan as a base from which to sponsor terrorist operations," a White House statement said. Ariana is the only international carrier with regular flights in and out of Afghanistan. "As such, we are concerned about the role it may play in ferrying material, personnel and finances to the Taliban. By designating the Taliban-controlled Ariana, it will be denied the benefits from dealings with U.S. businesses and financial markets," the statement added.

"As part of our strategy to isolate bin Laden and his supporters, we will continue to apply sanctions against him and those like the Taliban who support and assist him in carrying out his acts of violence," the White House said. It said it had so far identified \$500,000 in assets held by the airline that would be blocked under the move.

In reply to a question, White House Deputy Press Secretary David Leavy said Ariana has regular flights to India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). "And we will be talking with those countries in the days ahead to apply similar sanctions," he said.

The White House said the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control was reviewing reports that some foreign banks, businesses and individuals, including persons in the Middle East, were acting on behalf of or were providing material or financial support for the violent acts of bin Laden.

"Should these reports prove true and if these entities and individuals do not cease their support" to bin Laden, "they could potentially be named as Specially Designated Terrorists and face the same sanctions prohibitions" applied to the Saudi exile, it added.

This would mean that a foreign firm or individual designated for funding the violent acts of bin Laden or his front organisations would be denied access to US banks and financial entities. It would thus be shut out of U.S. markets and any of its property or assets within American jurisdiction would be blocked. The US, long frustrated by the Taliban's giving bin Laden refuge, launched air strikes on August 20, 1998, in retaliation for the embassy bombings in Africa.

Another US missile attack on Afghanistan likely

By Our Monitoring Desk

The chances of another US cruise missile attack on Afghanistan are growing as there was no change in Taliban's stand on Osama bin Laden, said BBC on Saturday.

Taliban neither expressed their willingness to hand over Osama to US where he is wanted on charges of patronising terrorism nor to send him to another country. The US has toughened its stand in this regard and its Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth has warned Taliban "if they want a confrontation with US then Washington is ready for it." Taliban have been declared a threat to national security in US, said the broadcast. America launched a cruise missile attack on Khost in Afghanistan last year where, according to US intelligence, Saudi dissident Osama was hiding.

Taliban are now encouraging local tribal leaders to stage pro-Osama and anti-US demonstrations.

NATION

01 AUG 1999

NATION 21 AUG 1999

Pakistan working for new transitional govt in Afghanistan

From Shamim Shahid

PESHAWAR — In connection with its efforts for what it claimed reconciliation among the warring Afghan factions, Pakistan is now struggling to convince the rivals over a new transitional government to be headed by former Afghan Prime Minister Abdul Samad Hamid.

Some highly placed sources told *The Nation* that so far Taliban have accepted this a proposal from Islamabad with some if and buts. However, some components of the Northern Alliance as well as a number of Jehadic forces are reluctant to recognise Samad Hamid as President. The proposal, Islamabad considers, could win the support of maxi-

num Afghan groups and could ensure a consensus among the ethnic Afghans who have been fighting for power since 1992 last.

Former Prime Minister Abdul Samad Hamid, belongs to a Pukhtoon tribe from the border Nangarhar province. At present he's residing in Germany. He remained as Prime Minister during the era of former king Mohammad Zahir Shah and late Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan. Since invasion of the former Soviet troops he remained neutral but had close contacts with a number of leading Jehadic forces in past.

Though Abdul Samad Hamid is considered among the supporters of former King Mohammad Zahir Shah but since long he has no links with the former King or his scattered supporters all over

the world. On these grounds, he is considered one of the favourites to Pakistan, therefore, he is facing resistance from the Northern Alliance as well as some of the moderate factions and forces.

Besides, rival Afghans, the neighbouring Islamic Republic of Iran which is considered an important party to Afghan conflict is also reluctant to accept such a proposal. Iran is supporting not only some of the Shia groups but also the Northern Alliance on the ground that they are against Taliban regime in Kabul. Now Iran is desirous for a negotiated solution to the conflict but is reluctant to accept any person who is under influence of Islamabad.

The sources maintained that after former King Mohammad Zahir Shah

renewed efforts for resolving of the issue, the Afghan policy makers at Islamabad decided to implement a plan like that of former UNO Envoy Benan Sevan. In this connection, they envisaged formation of a 22-member commission to be headed by former Afghan Prime Minister Abdul Samad Hamid. Taliban leadership and a number of former Jehadic and political groups have been taken into confidence on the issue.

But, the sources confirmed that Northern Alliance particularly its leaders like Ahmad Shah Masud, Gen. Rashid Dostam and Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani like people are reluctant to accept this proposal. Interestingly, former Nangarhar Governor Haji Abdul Qadeer Khan who is also a part to

the Afghan opposition alliance is favouring the proposal because of his personal relations with and friendship with Abdul Samad Hamid.

The official sources said the recent trip of a high ranking delegation headed by Rustam Shah Mohmand to Qandahar and central Asian Republics was focused on mustering support for this body. Recently, the Saudi Prince Shehzada Bandar head of Saudi secret agencies had also toured Afghanistan to help Pakistan in mustering support for this proposal.

However, a number of Afghan intellectuals view this fresh move would meet the fate of earlier moves and suggest that only convening of an emergency meeting of the Loya Jirga could help solve the conflict.

Sartaj holds talks with Afghan FM

ISLAMABAD, Aug 24: Foreign Minister, Sartaj Aziz had two hours of discussions with the Afghan Foreign Minister, Mulla Mohammad Hassan Akhund at the Foreign Office on Tuesday, covering a wide range of areas of mutual cooperation between the two countries.

The discussions particularly centred around matters relating to economic cooperation, transit trade, Afghan refugees and reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund arrived earlier in the afternoon at the head of a 14-man team.

Before leaving Kabul, Information Minister Mullah Amir Khan Muttaqi said the talks with Pakistan would focus on political, trade, transport and refugee issues.

Muttaqi, who is also a member of the delegation said they would meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz and other cabinet members.

"Afghanistan and Pakistan are two Muslim neighbours with good and historical relations and a long border," Muttaqi said.

The delegation includes the ministers of information and culture, commerce, frontiers, refugees and higher education along with senior officials of these ministries.

The Afghan foreign minister and his delegation will stay in Islamabad till August 27.—APP/AFP

DAWN

25 AUG 1999

Pakistan delegation back from Dushanbe

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, Aug 23: The Pakistani delegation playing the role of the 'facilitator' between the warring Northern Alliance (NA) and the Taliban for ending the internecine war in Afghanistan on Monday made a day long visit to Dushanbe to meet the representatives of the NA and returned to Islamabad the same evening.

There was no official word about the progress, if any, so far made by this official delegation which had gone to Dushanbe to convey to the representatives of Ahmed Shah Masood the response of the Taliban to the NA's three proposal envisaging arrangement for peaceful co-existence.

The basic purpose of visiting Dushanbe was perhaps to keep the contact with the NA alive while the Taliban discussed the proposals of the alliance with in the Shura and formulated a response.

None of the delegation's member, when contacted by *Dawn*, was available for comments on the progress they had made so far in their latest round of talks at Kandahar and Dushanbe.

It is expected that the delegation will now contact Taliban whom they met last Saturday, to get their response over NA's proposals.

The delegation which is currently engaged in this effort comprises Rustom Shah Mohmand, Additional Secretary Incharge of the Interior Ministry, as its head; Aziz Khan, Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan; and Ayaz Wazir, DG Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Reuters adds from Kabul: The anti-Taliban opposition said on Monday a second round of talks with Pakistani officials on ending the Afghan war had got nowhere but further rounds were expected.

Younus Qanooni, an aide to opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masood, told Reuters by satellite phone from Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, that the talks had failed.

He repeated allegations that Pakistan troops were fighting alongside the Taliban, together with recruits from Madrassas in Pakistan.

"Once again, we emphasized that the involvement of Pakistani religious students and its army in the Afghan conflict makes it impossible to accept its offer of mediation between us and the Taliban," Qanooni said.

It was the second round of talks between Pakistani officials and the opposition in a week and followed the failure of UN initiatives to end 20 years of factional, ethnic and political bloodshed.

The Taliban want Masood, who controls some areas north of Kabul, his native Panjsher valley and two northeastern provinces, to surren-

der and accept Taliban rule but Masood says he wants an interim government set up.

Pakistani envoys took Masood's proposal to the Taliban headquarters in Kandahar, home to Taliban's supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar.

"The Pakistani side did not have any comment from the Taliban or from Pakistani authorities about our proposal and today's talks failed, but we will have more meetings," Qanooni said.

Team leaves for Dushanbe today

Pakistan, Taliban discuss new peace proposals

By M. Ziauddin

ISLAMABAD, Aug 21: The Pakistani delegation engaged in shuttle diplomacy in Afghanistan returned here on Saturday evening from Kandahar after discussing with Mulla Omar the three proposals of the Northern Alliance (NA), envisaging possible arrangements for peaceful co-existence between the two warring sides.

According to the early schedule, the delegation, led by interior secretary Rustom Shah, will now fly back to Dushanbe with the counter proposals of Taliban.

Officials confirmed that the Pakistani delegation had returned to Islamabad but did not disclose any further details nor did they reveal any future plans of the delegation.

The alliance gave their proposals to the Pakistani delegation when the two had met in Dushanbe on Thursday. No details of these proposals were available as it was not considered advisable to make them public before the two warring factions reached an understanding on the basic principles of co-existence.

The Pakistani delegation is playing the role of a facilitator and it is not trying to mediate between the two sides, foreign minister Sartaj

Aziz said on Friday when asked for his comments on reports that the alliance had rejected Pakistan's move to mediate.

The five-member Pakistani delegation which also includes Pakistan's ambassador to Kabul, Aziz Ahmad Khan, had gone to Dushanbe on Thursday for talks with the alliance delegation led by Younis Qanooni, a close aide of Ahmad Shah Masood.

In the second phase of this initiative the Pakistani delegation met Mulla Omar in Kandahar on Saturday and returned here the same evening for consultation with

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authorities before undertaking the third phase of the shuttle diplomacy which would now take the Shah delegation to Dushanbe.

The new Pakistani peace initiative is said to be a part of the overall on-going international efforts to bring the Afghan parties to the negotiating table within the framework of the Six Plus Two Tashkent Declaration.

Officials described the new initiative as part of Pakistan's traditional role of seeking to promote an intra-Afghan dialogue.

No Pakistan troops in Kabul: FO

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, Aug 21: Pakistan released on Saturday the list of 11 Pakistan Army officers who the Northern Alliance (NA) has alleged had died fighting on the side of Taliban in the clashes between the two sides, which broke out recently in the Afghanistan.

Foreign office officials, while releasing the names of these 11 officers, claimed that two of them Brig Kifayat and Capt Musafir Alias Gulzar did not exist at all as persons with these names and ranks were never in the service of Pakistan Army while the rest of those named on the list were alive and living in Pakistan.

Two of them are still in service while the rest have retired. All the nine are said to have helped the Afghan Mujahideen during their struggle against the Soviet occupying troops.

The following are the names of the retired officers: Col Salim (ex-ISI), Lt Col Sanaullah alias Group Captain Sanaullah (ex-consular Mazar and now on LPR), Col Halim Shah (ex-ISI), Col Ali Hayder alias Col Mehboob (ex-ISI), Maj Haleem (ex-ISI), Maj. Akber Ali (ex-ISI), and Col Sajjad alias Col Mujahid (ex-ISI).

The two officers who are still in service include Capt Zafar Ul Haq (now Lt Col) and Maj Aizazullah/Ijazullah (now Lt Col).

The reports mentioning the names of these officers were said to have been published even in Iranian newspapers and on the basis of these reports Pakistan's Ambassador in Moscow, Mansoor

Alam, was reportedly summoned on August 11 by the Russian foreign office and handed over a protest note.

Pakistan has maintained that if any private individual has managed to cross the border and joined the ranks of the combatants, the government of Pakistan cannot be held responsible as "we do not want to see continued fighting in Afghanistan."

Pakistan has counter charged that those who accuse it of providing weapons, ammunition, logistic support and military training to Taliban were themselves providing similar assistance to the Afghan opposition.

"An entire trainload of weapons for the Northern Alliance sent through Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan was confiscated last October in Kyrgyzstan which should suffice as proof, if any were needed, to demonstrate from where and by whom massive quantities of weapons were being sent," said official sources.

When asked who was helping the Taliban if not Pakistan, these foreign office officials gave the details of large number of most modern and well-kept aircraft and tanks the Taliban had in their possession.

Afghan peace efforts to continue: official

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, Aug 25: Pakistan delegation on Monday in Dushanbe, had promised to consider seriously the proposals being negotiated between the warring sides, for resolving the conflict.

He was hopeful that the on-going dialogue process would continue and said that "we were told that they (the opposition) will contact us in 3 to 4 days after consultation."

Rustom said that Pakistan had initiated the renewed efforts for ending bloodshed in war-ravaged Afghanistan following a request from Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani. "We are talking to Rabbani at his request," he said, adding that Pakistan was still hopeful of a positive outcome of these efforts.

He maintained that in case the proposal being negotiated between the two sides by Pakistan did not work, Islamabad would float a new formula to bring the two sides to a point of agreement.

"We have several proposals in hand to facilitate the warring sides to reach a peaceful resolution of their conflict," he said, adding, "we will continue our efforts." Rustom Shah was, however, not ready to reveal any of these formulas.

ISLAMABAD, Aug 25: Pakistan has expressed its determination on Wednesday to continue its on-going efforts to help bring about a peaceful end to the Afghan conflict, despite the hiccups.

Talking to Dawn Rustom Shah Mohmand, Additional Secretary Incharge of the Interior Division, agreed that there was an effort to sabotage the peace process but, he said, Pakistan was determined to continue its efforts to establish lasting peace in Afghanistan.

Rustom, who is leading the Pakistani delegation facilitating 'distance negotiations' between the Taliban and the Afghan opposition, expressed his disappointment over the statements issued to the press by the Afghan opposition spokesman.

Rustom agreed that such statements were extremely damaging for the peace process. "I don't know on whose direction these statements are being issued by some members of Taliban opposition," Rustom wondered but said firmly that Pakistan would not be deterred by such hiccups.

He said that the opposition during its meeting with the Pakistani

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Pakistan regrets N. Alliance stance

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, Aug 24: Pakistan said on Tuesday that its efforts to seek a peaceful end to Afghanistan conflict can only succeed when those engaged in fighting would cooperate with Islamabad.

Taking strong exception to Younis Qanooni's statement which appeared in the press on Tuesday, the government said that it (the statement) had raised doubts and created a sense of uncertainty with regard to the on-going peace process.

In a clarification issued here by the interior ministry whose additional secretary in-charge Rustom Shah Mohmand is leading the Pakistani delegation facilitating 'distance negotiations' between the Taliban and the Afghan opposition, the government reiterated, "Pakistan has not been, and would not lend any support to any faction and would not sponsor any group or help any group to gain supremacy in Afghanistan."

This position was also explained to the Afghan delegation led by Qanooni, head of Northern Alliance negotiating team, who met with the Pakistani side in Dushanbe on Monday.

The interior ministry said that the latest process had been

launched by the prime minister at the request of Prof Burhanuddin Rabbani who had made a specific request to the former to intervene and help bring peace between the two warring sides.

"The prime minister of Pakistan decided to make fresh/renewed efforts in order to end bloodshed in Afghanistan so that peace returns to that war-ravaged country," the government handout said.

It added that during the talks with the Afghan delegation headed by Qanooni in Dushanbe on Aug 23, a specific proposal for resolving the conflict was discussed threadbare.

"At the end of the talks the Afghan delegation appreciated the sincerity of the prime minister of

disregard of what had transpired in the meeting, chose to once again accuse Pakistan of sending troops into Afghanistan and siding with 'Taliban' in the on-going conflict," said the interior ministry.

Mr Qanooni, it added, had also raised the point of Pakistan's alleged support to one side in the conflict during the Aug 23 meeting but this allegation was forcefully and firmly denied by Pakistan. Mr Qanooni was rather suggested to send his trusted lieutenants to any place on the Pakistan-Afghan border to see for themselves whether any Pakistan reinforcements were being dispatched across the border.

Emphasising that such statements tended to vitiate the atmosphere, the hand out said, "we are of the firm belief that Pakistan's efforts to seek peaceful end to the conflict can succeed only when those engaged in fighting would cooperate with Pakistan."

The interior ministry underlined that the foundation of Pakistan policy was that Afghanistan should return to peace and normalcy as quickly as possible. "It is hoped that if the talks are going to be fruitful and productive all concerned would lend their support to the peace process without any preconceived notions or suspicions," it concluded.

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Pakistan in trying to see an early end to fighting in Afghanistan," the clarification said, adding, "They informed the Pakistani delegation that the proposal put forward by us would be discussed with their top leaders and a response would be forthcoming very soon."

It was also agreed that the press would be informed that the talks were continuing and that the Afghan delegation would be responding to certain proposals in the next meeting.

"It is extremely unfortunate and shocking that Mr Qanooni in utter

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Pakistan ready to release Afghan goods under ATTA

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan government has expressed its will to release the goods that entered Pakistan through Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) and were held by Customs authorities at Karachi Port, said sources here on Friday.

Both Pakistani and Afghan officials led by Taliban Foreign Minister Mullah Muhammad Hassan Akhund agreed that goods held by Pakistani authorities would be released to be shifted to Afghanistan. These goods were held at Karachi Port a couple of years ago on the grounds that the same goods had no use in Afghanistan. The other reason the authorities gave, was that they were being smuggled back to Pakistani markets.

Pakistani traders welcomed the government decision of putting ban on trade of those items for Afghanistan which were later used to be smuggled to Pakistan.

The sources said that both the sides had agreed that they would release the present stock held at Karachi Port but would not allow trade of items that could not be used in Afghanistan. The Afghan delegation, however, insisted that trade of all items should be allowed and had tried to assure the Pakistani officials that items coming to Afghanistan through ATTA would not be smuggled back to Pakistan.

The two sides have also held positive talks about the opening of land routes at Torkhum, Spin Boldak and Ghulam Khan for the vehicles. There is a demand from the people of both the countries that vehicles movement should be allowed across-the-border.

The sources said the Afghan delegation also requested for reduction in the ratio of various taxes imposed on dry fruit coming to Pakistani market. They pleaded that the poor farmers of Afghanistan could import their products to Pakistan due to heavy levy of various kinds of taxes.

Sartaj holds talks with Afghan FM on ATTA

ISLAMABAD (APP) - Foreign Minister, Sartaj Aziz had two hours of discussions with the Afghan Foreign Minister, Mohammad Hassan Akhund at the Foreign Office on Tuesday, covering a wide range of areas of mutual cooperation between the two countries.

The discussions particularly centered around matters relating to economic cooperation, transit trade, Afghan refugees and reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund arrived earlier in the afternoon at the head of 14-member delegation. The delegation includes the ministers of information and culture, commerce, frontiers, refugees and higher education along with senior officials of these ministries.

The Afghan foreign minister and his delegation will stay in Islamabad till August 27. The delegation will also be holding talks with the other relevant Ministries of the government of Pakistan to examine ways to further expand bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan in diverse areas.

FRONTIER POST

25 AUG 1999

Broad-based govt favoured in Kabul

By Our Staff Correspondent

QUETTA, Aug 27: Formation of a broad based government in Afghanistan was necessary for the restoration of peace in that country.

This was stated by Mian Abdul Waheed, Chairman Standing Committee of the National Assembly on Foreign Affairs while talking to newsmen at Quetta Press Club here on Friday along with member of the committee Naeem Hussain Chatta.

"Pakistan was not supporting any group in Afghanistan and all its endures were to restore peace in that brotherly country," Mian Waheed said.

He said a broad based government could resolve the problems being faced by Afghan people for the last two decades and added that no single political group could govern the country.

He pointed out that Afghans by traditions were tune to the fact that the affairs of the country could be run through collective efforts and not by a particular group and if that happened then it was out of question that the affairs of the government could be run smoothly.

He said Pakistan was making all efforts to convince the warring factions to initiate political dialogue to resolve the Afghan conflict. He further said in this connection Pakistan was holding talks with

Taliban and leadership of Northern Alliance.

On Kargil issue, he said the matter was internationalise and did not agree that Pakistan's position was weaken due to Washington accord.

He conceded that China asked Pakistan to resolve the Kargil problem peacefully and stated that not only Pakistan but all states including Russia, Germany and Japan had accepted America as a super power in the world.

Mian Waheed said that personally he was in favour that Pakistan should refuse to pay the foreign debts as it was impossible that Pakistan could resolve its economic problems while paying the interests and instalments of foreign loans.

He observed that it is necessary that we should use our resources for the improvement of electronic media and in this connection he suggested that an international press centre should be established in Islamabad so that foreign correspondents should project Pakistani point of view at international level.

Responding to a question he said that government will not change the diplomats in foreign countries as they were acting according to the policies of the government.

He and Naeem Hussain Chatta defended Nawaz government internal and external policies.

Nawaz calls for durable peace in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (APP) - Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif Wednesday emphasized that restoration of durable peace in Afghanistan would open up enormous economic opportunities not only for Afghanistan but for the entire region.

The Prime Minister stated this while talking to Afghan Foreign Minister Mullah Hassan Akhund who called on him at Prime Minister's House. The Afghan delegation included six ministers and other senior officials.

Nawaz Sharif discussed with the Afghan Foreign Minister his latest peace initiative aimed at bringing the Afghan parties to the negotiating table for a peaceful solution of the Afghan problem.

He laid great emphasis on a settlement within the framework of the Tashkent Declaration of the 6-2 group.

The Prime Minister announced a donation of one thousand tents and two thousand blankets for the new refugees from the Shomali areas of Afghanistan to Kabul.

The donation will soon be despatched to the authorities in Kabul. This gesture was greatly appreciated by the Afghan delegation.

The Prime Minister was assisted by Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz, Foreign Secretary, Shamshad Ahmad, and other senior officials.

Later, the Afghan Foreign Minister accompanied by the Afghan Information Minister also held talks with Mohammad Siddique Khan Kanju, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

The talks particularly focused on political solution of the Afghan problem as well as trade and economic cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The need for a negotiated settlement of the Afghan problem was also emphasised.

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TEHRAN: Afghan refugees, holding posters of Ahmed Shah Masood, shout anti-Taliban slogans in front of the UN office here on Friday. —AFP

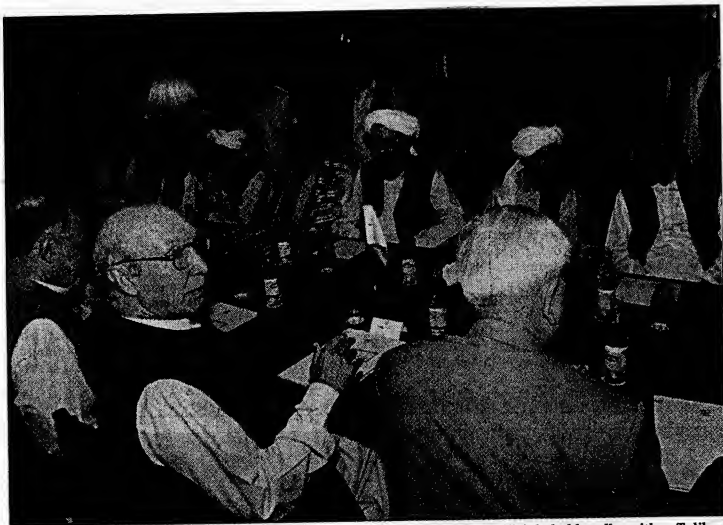


JABAL US SARAJ (Afghanistan): Soldiers of opposition commander Ahmed Shah Masood patrol the outskirts of this northern town. —Reuters

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ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz with other foreign ministry officials holds talks with a Taliban delegation headed by their Foreign Minister Mulla Mohammad Hassan Akhund (2nd R, behind) here on Tuesday.— AFP

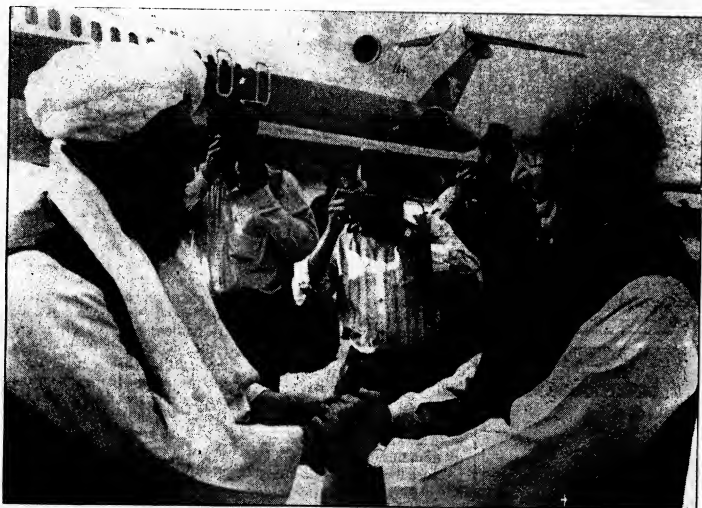


Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz and Afghan Ministers Saeedud Din Haggani and Mullah Hasan Akhund at PAF Base Chaklala, Rawalpindi on Tuesday.—Staff photo by Mian Khurshid

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THE NEWS INTERNATIONAL



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz receiving Afghan counterpart Mullah Hassan Akhund at the Chaklala Airbase on Tuesday. — F.P. photo by by AGHA MAHROZ

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif receives Afghan Foreign Minister Mulla Mohammad Hassan Akhund for a meeting.—Staff photo by Mian Khurshid

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